THE WINNING CHANCE

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

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THE WINNING CHANCE

FACING EACH OTHER AT LAST, THE GIRL WHITE, SHAKING, HER EYES AFLAME

Page 97

THE WINNING CHANCE

By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

WITH A FRONTISPIECE
BY
GAYLE PORTER HOSKINS

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
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BOOK I.

THE WINNING CHANCE

I.

THE INNER SANCTUM

THE door of the inner office of Varek & Co., Stockbrokers, had opened so quietly that Leo Varek had not heard it, but the click of the typewriters and ticker in the outer office smote his ear more sharply, and he looked up. A young girl had come timidly forward to his desk, and when he lifted his head he met directly her troubled and more than half frightened gaze.

"This is Mr. Varek?" she asked, hesitatingly. "I have a note for you from Mr. Calvin Bronson." She reached across to him the paper, but while he took it his sharp eyes did not leave her face.

Then he glanced at the envelope. "Bronson," he said in a puzzled way; then whirling round in his chair and pointing to one near him, "Sit down, please."

The girl obeyed, eying him anxiously as she sat, one hand tightly holding the other in her lap. But his face was expressionless, and her eyes dropped to the tip of her much worn shoe, which she hastily drew

under her skirt, and then wandered up to the window. Something bright had dropped out of the sky to the sill and perched there as if panting, gently waving to and fro its gauzy, scarlet wings.—A butterfly!—What had blown it out of the yellowing September fields and dropped it, helpless, into this ceaseless roar and clang, with nothing but hard granite to rest upon?—Something like this and more passed through the girl's mind, and her great blue eyes widened, and a faint color tinged her white cheek. A vision that was always in the background of her thoughts arose distinct, and the click of the typewriters and the incessant bellow of the city faded into a mere murmur.

Varek read the note through carefully and looked at the girl a minute, then going back to the note read it through a second time; turning then slightly, with bent head and a sidelong glance he studied his companion for some time. Her eyes were on the window, absorbed, and he took her in from head to foot—the cheap sailor hat with its bit of veil, the worn but neat black dress, and the carefully mended gloves—the tip of each finger he could see was worn through and darned. But the face above the bit of white at her throat was a very flower; no hat however cheap could spoil that wealth of dark hair, growing in a soft wave from neck and brow; the contour of cheek and chin, the sweet full mouth, and the low, well-marked brow were all lovely in line and coloring.

Even with ordinary eyes the face would have been unusually pretty, but in all his life Varek had never seen such eyes—very large, too deep a blue to be gray, narrow and shaded by very long, very black lashes in repose, wide and deep when looking as she had looked at him across the desk. It did not strike him until he knew her face better that it was the lack of white in the eyes that caused their unusualness. His gaze dropped next to her rounded bust and small waist, and a flicker of something like a smile crossed his face.

"Bronson tells me you can manage a typewriter well and are used to correspondence, Miss Carew," he said, abruptly, his voice incisive in spite of a natural thickness of utterance.

The girl turned to him with a quick start and the wide look he had expected. "Yes," she said, almost stammering, "I—I have worked for him, and I think I could be quick and please you. I certainly should try!" Her voice gained confidence and her lips smiled a little, but her eyes were anxious. Her embarrassment only accentuated the southern softness of her speech, particularly as it lingered on the "certainly."

Varek laughed as if amused, his eyes dwelling on her a moment; then he turned and caught up a letter. "Just copy that, please," he said; "here is the typewriter."

He moved very quickly for a heavily built man—just as the swift glance of his keen eye belied the almost stolid look of his dark, rather fleshy face. He stood by the typewriter as the girl pulled off her gloves, and not a movement or turn of her body escaped him. He looked down at her as her delicate hands rattled over the keys, her lips parted, flushing in her eagerness to do her work well and win approval of the tall man at her side, and he smiled again, this time with his eyes as well as his lips, a far pleasanter expression on his face.

"All right," he said; "you're not slow. Now I tell you—you come on trial for a couple of days—come to-morrow. I want some one to do my personal correspondence, it's a nuisance to take it out to those girls, and they have all they can manage anyway.—Then we will see." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully a moment, looking at her. "Mr. Bronson says he will find you a place before he goes; he seems interested in you." The tone was a question.

"Yes, sir, he knew my father; he has been kind to us since he died." She spoke now with composure, but she did not look at him.

"Fine man, Bronson," said Varek, his mustache lifting over his big strong teeth,—"always doing good, looking out for the helpless, and protecting the widow and orphan! Isn't it so?" and he continued to smile at the startled look of the girl. Then before

she could answer, "By the way, how did you get to my room without being announced?" he demanded.

"I asked one of the girls, and she pointed to this room and called 'Barnes,' but no one came, so she said, 'Go right in, you will be welcome.' "

"Which one said that?" he asked, sharply, and the girl colored, fearing from his black look that she had made trouble.

"Never mind," he said. "It was the one with the yellow pompadour, *nicht wahr?*—Well, to-morrow at nine," and he whirled himself into place at his desk. The girl went out, and he watched her slender figure and erect carriage as she passed through the outer office, the street door being opened by "Barnes."

Varek's mouth set in a hard line. "Now," said he, low and very forcibly, "that double damned, hypocritical skunk!—What's his game?—Carew—Carew—I'll get it placed if I think a while. Janet Carew, the little violet—and I believe it's a real one too, in spite of appearances. But, God, what eyes!—one could drown in them." His face had darkened, and the vein in his forehead swelled; then he shrugged his big shoulders. "Twenty minutes of my precious time gone," he said.

II.

VAREK SEEKS INFORMATION

THE next was a busy day at Varek's, and Janet Carew scarcely left her seat at the typewriter. Varek was in and out; Ehrenstein and Braun, who formed the "Co." part of Varek's establishment, came and went at intervals, casting as they did surreptitious glances of interest at the new stenographer; there were many interviews in the general office which lay between Varek's private room and the outer office, but Janet's eyes never left her work. Varek was amused by her absolute concentration. He had questioned her as opportunity occurred. She had worked several months for Mr. Bronson, had done whatever extra work there was in the office, whatever the regular and more experienced stenographer did not get through with; in fact she had learned all she knew at Bronson's, and Varek classified it in his own mind as a "made place."

Then as skilfully as possible he tried to find out a little about herself, and to his surprise was made to feel much as he might have, had he forgotten himself and endeavored to question one of the ladies whose well-bred interest in stocks and bonds might have led them to his office. He could not have told just how the

shock had been conveyed to him, but for an instant he travelled backward in time to the days when he looked on and did not possess. He was again the humble office boy and clerk at Bronson's—a big step backwards, and one he did not often take. The next moment he was Leo Varek with his money behind him, and the little figure with its big coil of wavy hair was as deferentially asking him for directions as if that flash of remembrance had never had a cause. But Varek's thoughts had been given a turn to the past and he pondered over it, seeking again for the recollection that had evaded him the day before.

He asked no more questions, but the half-contemptuous wonder he had had all day as to his intention of granting Bronson "a favor," ceased. There were other ways of finding out all he wished to know; then too he cared more about knowing now than he had.

He got out a file of old letters and looked them over carefully, and then consulted another file dated not six months back. They seemed to merit his attention, for he stayed in the office later than usual, and when he nodded his brief good-night to Janet there was a veiled interest in his keen gray eyes. Left to himself, he got out Mr. Bronson's smoothly worded note of the day before, and his look went to the girl's empty chair as if calling up a vision of her. His heavy jaw set in a hard line. "We'll see," he said, half aloud.

He got up and put the papers away, and swinging into his overcoat went out. As he walked along he nodded here and there to the many well-dressed men who passed him bound for their clubs or homes. More than one of them stinted by nature in stature or robustness, might have eyed enviously the well-groomed, upright figure as it passed on. In spite of weight and the hair touched with gray at the temples, the whole man breathed an alert strength, and the reason was not far to seek. To the professional eye, Varek's physique might have done service in the ring, and even now, under the accumulated flesh of good living, the muscles were powerful. With a dull look his personality would have been merely bull-like in its force, but his quick eye, gray as steel, under his straight, black brows, placed him undeniably among the keenly intelligent.

Turning up a couple of blocks, he entered the Commercial Club, and giving his hat and coat to the boy asked carelessly, "Any one in the library?"

"One or two, sir; there's been a meeting, but they're mostly in the billiard room now."

Varek turned into the billiard room, casting a glance into the library as he passed. There was no one there but a large bald-headed man who appeared to be busy over some papers at one of the tables. Varek stood near the door watching a game of billiards until a little gesticulating man who was doing

the same joined him. Turning into the library then with his companion, he led him with apparent carelessness to one of the windows near the bald-headed man, to whom he nodded. Then he ordered drinks. "Join us, Bronson?" he asked.

"Thank you, Varek," said Mr. Calvin Bronson; "a mint-julep for me, please."

"Now, how can you bear those sweet things, Bronson," said the little man. "You'll have to take four months off each year if you make mint-juleps your steady. See here, Varek," he went on, looking with impish eyes at the blandly smiling old man, much as a little worrying terrier might face the benign gaze of a middle-aged Newfoundland, " what a picture for our trouble-making Press—Bronson in full flight—coat-tails streaming—before the onslaught of a mint-julep on thin legs, with a background of animated real estate—the narrow three-story kind, Bronson, like those on lower Pine, say; they have an eyes-nose-and-mouth look, legs easily supplied." The little man went into a convulsion of laughter in which Varek joined, though moderately; for a quick spasm had crossed Mr. Bronson's face and though it was followed immediately by his usual wide, tolerant smile, there was no disguising the dull red that slowly turned his fat neck almost purple.

He bent suddenly to gather up his papers, and the little man plunged immediately into a rattling com-

mentary on the stock variations of the day,—a bit of gossip about this deal and that; then drinking his high-ball, as he always did, at two gulps, he was up, and with a brief, "'By, Varek, ta-ta, Bronson, love calls," was gone.

"Idiotic little whirlwind," said Varek, laughing, his cold eye still on the fat face before him.

But Mr. Bronson made no comment. He placidly sipped his julep, looking blandly at Varek out of his rather prominent light blue eyes. Their underhanging puffiness gave him a somewhat unwholesome look that the florid complacency of the rest of the face did much to counteract.

They looked two very prosperous men in the warm glow of the sinking sun that flooded in for a time through the high window.

"I am glad I happened to see you to-day," said Varek, finally. "I got your note, and wanted to thank you for your offer on that Whery stock. It looks a good thing to me." His manner was perfunctory, and the older man's answer was as indifferent, save for the touch of pompous graciousness rarely absent from Mr. Calvin Bronson's dealings with any man.

"It is a good thing," he said. "It's the most promising local investment, looking to the future, that I know of. In my estimation that stock will soar. Wait till next year; it is one of the things that in the natural course of events are sure to boom."

"I don't believe the Consolidated Electric is anything so sure," remarked Varek.

"It will be all right, too," said Mr. Bronson, "if one knows just when to pull out of it," and he smiled at the other.

"That's what I'd call a pure gamble," said Varek. "I'm only a little in, but thanks for the hint. I suppose it will be a case of the devil take the hindermost."

They smoked in silence for a time, then Varek knocked the ash from his cigar and looked at his watch. "Six," he said; "I've got to stop at the office before I go up town. By the way, the girl who brought your note gave me a trial day to-day. I believe I can use her, though I can't do much more for her than you did, just odds and ends and letters,—but I suppose you meant me to gather that your Whery stock had that string tied to it? I am not used to doing business that way, but in this case I believe I will take you," and his hard eye travelled over the older man. "She's a pretty little thing and has a good face," he continued with a certain curtness, "and she doesn't seem used to work and dresses hard up—who is she?"

Mr. Bronson moved his big hand and turned down the leaf of a magazine, and he spoke with apparent reluctance. "Yes, she is hard up," he said, "very hard up—but she is clever too. She hasn't starved

so far, and she won't—not with her face—though she is rather inexperienced yet. Still—" he looked up then and met Varek's cutting glance, and swerved quickly to another point. "I really am relieved that you can give her something to do now I am going away, for the family needs it badly enough!"

"Where is the father?" asked Varek.

"Dead," said Calvin Bronson. "Poor Denis Carew! He went to the dogs generally, and left them without a penny. They are Virginians, and come of a good family too, but they have no kin so far as I could discover when I looked into their affairs and tried to help them. I knew their father slightly. The mother came from New Orleans, and is French. I really don't know when I have met a family so destitute of anybody or anything in the way of assistance." Mr. Bronson shook his head deprecatingly.

"How many of them are there?"

"The mother, a boy, and this girl," said Mr. Bronson, "but the worst of it is that they are invalids. The mother has heart trouble and is blind, the result of some accident, and the brother was hurt at the same time. I don't know the rights of it all, but the girl was responsible for the accident in some way, and she has it pretty strongly on her mind."

"An accumulation of sorrows," remarked Varek, drily.

"Isn't it!"

Varek was about to rise. "If Mr. Carew had only saved them out a trifle, now, from the wreck, you might not be looking for another guardian for his family." He spoke carelessly, but for a fleeting moment the muscles of the florid face before him were not under perfect control. Then Calvin Bronson looked down sighing. "Poor Denis Carew," he said; "he was too unpractical for this life, and a spendthrift in the bargain."

"There couldn't be a worse epitaph for any man," said Varek, getting up briskly. "It affords such opportunities to the other fellow. Well, I must be off."

As the boy helped him on with his coat at the door, he noticed that Mr. Varek was smiling; it wasn't at any one in particular, the boy reflected, and it wasn't a very pleasant smile either. Nor was the expression that radiated Mr. Calvin Bronson's broad countenance as he passed out later on, one of unmixed kindliness; there was a certain likeness in the quality of the two expressions.

III.

LIZZIE REFLECTS

JANET CAREW had knocked several times on the partly opened door of Lizzie McGinniss's flat, but Lizzie was admonishing her family with such a vehement flow of Irish that nothing short of a violent pounding could have been heard, so, giving up her polite endeavors at last, the girl pushed the door a little further open and thrust in her head. She was well acquainted with the aspect of the battered, high-ceilinged room into which she looked, and also with its occupants, and her red lips lifted at the corners, her eyes full of smiling amusement at the picture before her.

At one side of the room stood a little scraggy woman whose face with its upturned nose and wide mouth was almost a caricature of Irish ugliness, irresistibly taking in its contrariety of expression, for the brows and eyelids ludicrously suggested the singeing effect of a recent gasoline explosion, over the comic aspect of which her bright blue eyes seemed to brim with laughter, setting at naught even the disapproval of the long upper lip. They twinkled now in spite of the apparent wrath that drew the portentous lip to a grotesque length, and Janet, who understood the scene perfectly, looked on in appreciative silence.

Lizzie Reflects

Lizzie was holding up before the round eyes of a scantily clad little boy, a very tattered pair of trousers, and there was no lack of expression in her language. "It's th' onthankful villain ye are," she blazed. "Is it th' day long I'm to sit here a-sewin' f'r th' loikes iv ye? Does yer faither roll in his autoomobile, an' yer mither go to th' theyater in silks, that ye think ye can threet th' clothes God gave ye loike this!" and Lizzie thrust her skinny hand through a ragged hole in the seat of the unfortunate breeches, and pointed a damning finger at the bare red legs of her son.

His eyes followed the direction of the pointing finger, and he gazed a moment at his extremities without a change of expression; then suddenly his stubby nose went up, his eyes shut tight, and his mouth opened a very gulf, prepared to give forth such a roar as only Denis McGinniss could accomplish—when Janet's clear voice cried, "boo."

Lizzie flew to the intruder, and the eyes, nose, and mouth of Denis regained their normal position with lightning-like rapidity, presenting in repose an undeniable resemblance to his mother's comic features. The little woman's eyes were dancing. "Miss Jannie, an' it's really yersilf?" she cried. "It's ages since I set me eyes on ye," and Lizzie shook hands, pushed the girl into a chair, and found one for herself, all in the space of a few seconds.

Janet smiled into the beaming face before her. "I have wanted to come, Lizzie," she said, "but I have been so busy all day, and you know I can't leave mother and Paul in the evening. Are you all well?"

"We're none iv us sufferin' but Dinis," returned Lizzie, her upper lip lengthening again as she looked severely at her wonderstruck offspring. "Come here, Dinis!" she commanded. "Now fur why shud ye stand starin' loike a stuck pig? Ye know Miss Jannie well. It's th' trial iv me life he is," she declared sorrowfully, her bright eyes twinkling with inward mirth, "an' ye'll agree with me whin I tell ye that in wan week he's dhrounded himsilf in Mrs. O'Harra's rain-barrel, he's lost himsilf entoirely three toimes, an' that not bein' enough, he split his head yisterday on th' stove, an' only jist now the goat in th' alley punched th' last bit iv breath out iv his body, an' ate up his beautiful pants!"

"Oh, Lizzie," said the girl, laughing a little unsteadily, "it certainly is good to hear you again," and she gently gathered under her arm the round head of the many-lived Denis. The little boy stole a quick look at her, and moved a little closer to her side; he liked the feeling of the soft cheek that rubbed his red hair.

Lizzie looked at her too with a very loving light in her eyes. "How is yer mither, and Misther Paul?" she asked. "I've thought iv ye all ivry day."

"They are not any better, Lizzie. If I only could think that mother was a little bit stronger—it would be easier. Mother doesn't go out of the rooms even, any more." The words came with difficulty, and the girl did not raise her head; Denis felt something hot roll down his cheek. There was a world of sympathy in the look Lizzie gave the bent head, and her bright eyes lost their twinkle.

"I know it well, me Lady-Bird," she said, softly, patting the girl's quivering shoulder. "But cryin' won't mend it, darlin'. It's brave ye must be, it's th' on'y wurrud fur ye."

"I know it. I am ashamed to come here and be so silly," said Janet in smothered tones. "But I have no one I can talk to but you, Lizzie."

"An' why shud ye not, thin!" the woman answered warmly,—"me that loves ye like wan iv me own! It's on'y Mrs. O'Harra's parrot an' a ijiot, that laughs all th' toime. . . . . But what wud ye say to a cup iv tay now, dearie,—an' some cookies? It's an empty stummick that makes a sorrowful wurruld—Dinis can tell ye that! Sure, it was something whispered me this mornin' ye wud be comin'," and Lizzie bustled into the next room, only pausing to command Denis to "sit in Mary's petticoat th' while."

The little boy evidently understood from previous experience, for he drew himself from Janet's encir-

cling arm, and climbing up on a chair he removed from a nail on the wall a cotton-flannel garment that once had been pink, and bringing it back laid it gravely on Janet's knee. As she bent over him, silently assisting him into it with shaking hands, the little boy studied her downcast face and wet eyelashes, pondering the situation thoughtfully after his own fashion. He spoke finally in a whisper, but very positively. "It *doesn't* laugh all of the time," he said.

"What doesn't, Dennie?" Janet asked, absently.

"The parrot."

The girl's eyes brightened, and the corners of her mouth lifted a little. "Are you sure, Denis?" she said, softly.

He cast a disapproving glance in the direction of his mother, and a provocative one upward at Janet. "I've heared it," he said; "it snores."

"*Does* it?"

"Yis, it does—I've heared it. It snores jist like Misther O'Harra." Denis laid his head on one side and closed his eyes. "It snores, an' it snores, an' it *snores*—an' all at once it jist jumps right up and says, *damn!*" and the little boy sprang upright in sudden delight, his little nose wrinkled and his eyes brimming with laughter, an irresistible challenge to the girl's sad humor. She gathered him up in her arms, and her laugh brought Lizzie to the door.

"That sounds good, dearie," she said. "Dinis, what was it ye was sayin' to Miss Jannie thin?" But Denis was not communicative, and Janet held her peace. Her face settled gradually into its usual quiet lines, but she drew Denis's little chair close to her side, and a little later on a large half of her cookie found its way into his capacious mouth.

Lizzie had laid a cloth for the tea on the rough pine table, and as she sat and watched the color come into Janet's tired face her whole expression was a smile of pleasure. The girl looked up and caught it, and her own face broke into a smile that made her look as young as Denis. " It's good, Lizzie," she said, gratefully; " I really was hungry, for I was working so hard all day that I forgot about lunch."

"That's no way to do—to forgit to eat," said Lizzie, severely, "an' they've got no right to make ye wurruk so hard—ye're nothin' but a little girl inny-way," and the woman's voice shook with indignation.

"It wasn't anybody's fault but mine," said Janet quickly; "I am stupid about office work really; and if I am worried about other things I make mistakes."

"An' what was throublin' ye thin, dearie?"

Janet sighed. "Oh, a lot of things, but mostly about our rooms. We must make a change, Lizzie, and very soon. They cost too much, and I have such a long car ride going and coming. Then, too, I must find some one whom I can trust who will keep an eye

on mother, and see that they are not in need of anything—I am terrified every day now that I leave them alone, they are so helpless."

"An' what did ye think ye wud do?" the woman questioned anxiously. "Movin' costs, or I wudn't be stayin' where I be mesilf. If th' Lord had on'y made birds iv us, or not to be too partic'lar, jist innything that didn't need a roof an' cud go in its nothings, it wud be savin' us a good bit iv throuble, I'm thinkin'," and Lizzie sighed in her turn.

"Birds, yes!" said Janet; "but unfortunately we're just people. . . . I've worried and worried over it, and you know, Lizzie, I have concluded that if those rooms up-stairs are empty yet, the best thing is for us to come here."

"Here, Miss Jannie!" Lizzie exclaimed, in amazement. "Ye can't live here!"

"Yes, we can, Lizzie," Janet answered positively. "I think we must; and my main reason is that you will be near mother. We can't afford more than three rooms anywhere now, and I can do the work in them easily—it's not *that* I want your help for. It's just to have you near if mother or Paul should need anything. That would not be a trouble to you, would it, Lizzie?"

"Ye know well it wud be me pleasure," the woman answered, looking thoroughly distressed. "But, dearie, it's a poor place, this house—an' fur yer mither too."

"Oh, I know, I know what you mean, but, Lizzie, I have no pride left about those things. We are dreadfully hard up, and if I can just keep a roof over their heads, and a fire for them to sit by, and a little good food—it's all I ask. It is dirty here, I know—the halls and stairways—but it is cheap and near you——" The girl reached over and slipped her hand into the woman's. "Lizzie, I am dreadfully worried, and I cannot think of anything better to do—can you?"

Lizzie looked into the girl's big troubled eyes and sat thinking for a time. "That Misther Bronson that ye wurruk for," she asked, finally, "he was a friend iv yer faither, won't he lend ye jist a little hilpin' hand, Miss Jannie?"

"He is going away, to Europe," said Janet, with a quick flush. "He arranged for me to get another position, and Monday I begin regularly. With the little experience I have had I am fortunate. But, Lizzie, after this we *must* live on what I earn. There is no help coming from anywhere."

"Well thin," said Lizzie, with a sigh, "ye are sinsible to thry and save all ye can, but I wud loike a better home fur ye."

"A palace, perhaps," said Janet, smiling. "Lizzie, take me up to see those rooms, will you?"

"We must get thim keys thin," said Lizzie. "Hist, Mary," she called to a little girl who had just

come into the back room, "don't ye wake th' baby now. Come in here, darlin'. Now jist ye rin up to Mrs. O'Harra and ask her fur th' keys to th' upstairs—but spake to Miss Jannie furst, can't ye? It's yer manners ye've lost, I'm thinkin'."

Janet patted the cheek of the little girl who looked up shyly at her through her mane of brown hair. Mary was the annual step taller than Denis, and a pretty child. Mary and Patty were twins, then came Denis and the baby. "The baby must have grown even since I saw him last," said Janet. "He will be walking about soon, won't he, Lizzie?"

"Yis," said the woman, resignedly, "jist whin I'll be hilpless on me back. There's anither comin' in January, Miss Jannie."

"Oh, Lizzie," said the girl in consternation, and then added quickly, "I will be here to help you then."

"Me Lady-Bird!" said the woman, with a bright look, "don't ye be after throuble too soon. It'll be toime enough when it's yer own. But it's not I that's grievin'. I love th' childher. If Patrick kapes his place, an' th' Lord spares us sickness, I have a light heart in me body."

Mary now came with the keys and Lizzie led the way into the hall and upstairs. The house was very old and, at one time, had been the residence of a well-to-do family, but it stood now surrounded by tenements as did a number of large old houses in that

neighborhood. Some enterprising owners had conceived the idea of turning the three floors into flats to meet the needs of the steadily encroaching slums, and now these old homes, once so stately, that during the transition period had been a dead loss, were fair income-bearing property. It was a thoroughly poverty-stricken section, hovering on the edge of one of the worst slums of the city, but not yet engulfed.

The hallway was deep and the stairs wide and dimly lighted, for the big stained-glass window on the landing, that in its grandest days cast but a subdued light, was now so obscured by dust and grime as to be practically worthless as a light-giving medium. Perhaps that was the reason the big front doors stood open all day and most of the night.

Lizzie stopped on the second floor and opened the door of the front room. A close, musty smell of stale cooking greeted them, but they folded back the battered Venetian blinds and raised a window, letting in air and the western sunshine. Janet looked eagerly about her. This house, like most of its period, was three rooms deep, each opening into the other, and each having a door into the hall. The smoke-blackened ceilings were very high, the windows narrow and tall, and there was a heavy cornice that once had been elaborately decorated. The walls, like Lizzie's, downstairs, were scratched and dirty. Janet sighed as she looked, but she spoke decidedly.

"I will take them, Lizzie."

"Ye know best," said the woman. "I wud turn thim into a beautiful palace if I had th' rinnin' iv th' wurruld."

A four-story tenement shut out all light from the side windows, but the sun could still look into the front and back rooms, and Janet made her plans. "Mother can have the front and Paul the back room, and the middle room will have to be the kitchen, though it is dreadfully dark. . . . Lizzie, I believe I can make them comfortable here."

"As usual ye are not namin' a spot fur yersilf, I notice," Lizzie remarked, but Janet was too much occupied to pay attention. The back room had an unsightly pile of rubbish, beer-bottles, cardboard boxes, and tins in one corner, and Janet was looking at them with disapproval.

"I am coming to-morrow to clean up," she announced. "It is Sunday and I can work all day. Lizzie, soap and water and air will make a mighty difference here."

"I'll be a-hilpin' ye thin," said Lizzie, firmly. "Ye may do th' sweepin', but ye'll not be at th' scrub wurruk. Thim pretty hands in scrub water! Ye'll fair drive me wild;" and all the shocked anxiety that the woman had been trying to hide, spoke in her tones.

Janet turned and caught her by the shoulders, her

face quivering, half laughter, half tears. "Lizzie, Lizzie," she said, "listen to me. You must understand now, and once for all, that I am *not* the little girl you used to know. I am just a hard-working woman, like you, like the others in this house. I have no more right to impose upon you than they, and I will *not* come here and put another burden on your shoulders. If you will just understand this, and not fret about me, I shall go away this evening much happier than I have been for weeks. There are things that look a good deal worse to me than hard work." The girl was drawing her breath quickly, half sobbing.

"Me darlin'," said the woman, the whole warm heart of her in her voice, "it's anythin' in th' wurruld ye may tell me an' I'll believe ye; an' ye may do what ye plaze an' I'll not hinder ye; but if it's askin' me to stop lovin' ye, ye are—that I'll *not* do," and Lizzie was crying in earnest now.

"Oh, my!" said Janet, laughter uppermost now, "here we are like two geese crying over nothing. Lizzie, don't. It's my birthday to-day; do you know it? I am twenty—think of it! Come wish me good luck, and let's go down to the children. You silly little thing!"

"Well thin," said Lizzie, recovering herself with Irish promptitude, "ye're not a Misthress Goliah yersilf, that ye shud be spakin' scornful of me size;" and they went down, and Janet effectually banished

tears. She told the delighted Mary, Patty, and Denis a story that doubled up their little bodies with laughter. She mimicked the colored lady who wished to buy a fan of the grand-looking floor-walker, and couldn't remember what it was called.

"'Oh! my mighty man, don' you know,
Et's a Sunday-go-to-meetin' thing,
That goes jes' so!'"

quoted Janet with the true darky swing, but it was lightly and daintily done, and Mr. Leo Varek, of Varek & Co., would have opened his eyes wide, had he seen the vivid face of his quiet little stenographer.

"Arrah, an' ye're nothin' but a child loike th' rist," said Lizzie, drawing breath after her laugh.

"Yes, and Irish too," answered the girl. "I'm not a Carew for nothing, Lizzie dear."

Janet had gone, but the puzzled and troubled look came back to Lizzie's face and did not leave it. Try as she would, she could not adapt herself to the new aspect of things. That Mr. Carew had lost his money, and that Janet was working to support the family, Lizzie knew well enough, but her imagination had never separated them from the very comfortable surroundings that had been theirs.

She had been their servant in New York during the time that Mrs. Carew and Paul had been there under

treatment. It was after the accident that had brought them all such trouble, and little Janet had told Lizzie the whole story.

"It was all my fault," the child had said, her thin little body quivering. "I made them let me drive and it frightened the horses." They had all been thrown out, and of the three Janet had escaped injury. Mrs. Carew had struck her head and for some time they had thought she could not live. Paul, a nervous, delicate child, appeared at first to have fared better, but as time went on, what had seemed to be only a badly wrenched back developed into something more serious. The country doctor began to shake his head over the pale, big-eyed boy who lay helpless so long.

At the words "spinal trouble," Mr. Carew took fright and brought them all to New York. What doctors could do for them was done, but it was poor comfort they gave. Mrs. Carew was to face the prospect of failing sight, for this peculiar result of her accident had already begun to manifest itself, and for Paul the future was scarcely more promising. At least it seemed so to him, and one of the first thoughts that entered and settled in Paul's mind when he realized that he might be a life-long cripple, was a bitter resentment against Janet.

All their lives there had been little in common between the two children. There was only a year's dif-

ference in their ages, but the reserved, sensitive boy, living much in his imagination, had no understanding of Janet's high-strung temperament. Underlying his frequent sense of irritation toward her, was a gnawing jealousy. From babyhood she had turned to love as naturally as a flower to the sun, and just as naturally it had warmed and sheltered her, but Paul had often felt cold. Aided by this bitterness of spirit, Paul's conviction of his real condition settled into the adamant that was all unsuspected by those about him, a fundamental part of his composition. From her mother Janet had never had a reference to her part in the fearful accident; she would never have dreamed of such a thing, and for a long time she had no suspicion of what the child was suffering; but not so Paul.

Lizzie had found the little girl one day crouched in her room, purple and choking, beside herself with misery and self-reproach. Bit by bit Lizzie had got the truth from her. Paul had hardly spoken to her since his hurt. In every loving way she had tried to show him her sympathy and that day he had turned on her. "Leave me alone!" he had screamed at her. "You did it. Get out of my sight!"

With every reasoning power she possessed Lizzie had tried to comfort the agonized little soul, but it was the pressure of her arms and the loving sympathy of the Irish girl's warm heart, that was the real solace.

From that day in spite of his very evident suffering Lizzie despised Paul Carew. Mrs. Carew she truly pitied, but Janet she loved with every bit of her. Mr. Carew she regarded much as she did her own Carews of Conalty. Her great-grandfathers had pulled their forelocks, and her grandams had courtesied, to them for generations. Set Mr. Carew beside the Conalty Carews in their own hall and he would be one of them; the very portraits would recognize him, for three generations didn't make much difference. His great-grandfather had been a Conalty Carew, he told Lizzie, and his own father had ridden to hounds and drunk himself under the table in Virginia, just as did his several-times-removed cousin in Ireland. And the same qualities of openhanded generosity, love of adventure, and passion for the game of chance that had wasted away the birthright of the Carews of Conalty, had wasted away Janet's.

The Carews had gone sadly back to their quiet home in Virginia, and Janet had taken up her task of caring for the helpless, the feeling of her own responsibility heavy upon her. She was eyes to her mother, and hands and feet to Paul, and thought for herself lost its place in her life. If she ever forgot, Paul proved an effective reminder. It was a hard school, and she learned to think and not speak, to endure and show little sign, and to hide timidity and sensitiveness under a controlled exterior.

Lizzie had married her Patrick and come West, but she and Janet had never forgotten each other, and strangely enough they had come into touch again. Mr. Carew had gone to that place where one is supposed to answer for one's own sins and not for those of one's forebears, and his family were strangers in a strange city. They had come to Mr. Calvin Bronson in the hope of possibly getting back some fragment of their squandered possessions, for he appeared to be the only man who knew anything at all about Mr. Carew's financial ventures. During the last two years Mr. Carew had spent less and less time with his family, and they knew practically nothing of his life away from them. He had spoken vaguely of large sums he was about to make, but his remittances had dwindled to nothing. When he had at last returned to them he was a fatally stricken man, and beyond speech.

Mr. Bronson's sympathy for them was warmly expressed, and he set promptly to work in an endeavor to untangle the complicated skein of Mr. Carew's affairs. It proved hopeless, for there was absolutely nothing left; their longed-for fragment was denied them, and they faced abject poverty. In their helplessness and distress Mr. Bronson had shown them every consideration and kindness, and his final offer of a place for Janet in his office was a bit of fortune she had eagerly accepted.

Lizzie Reflects

And as Lizzie cooked her simple supper and waited for her man, she tried to realize that the little Janet, whose father was a Carew of Conalty if ever there was one, would to-morrow scrub her own floor just as Lizzie herself did. Six years or so of American independence does much to instil the idea of equality in the immigrant mind, but an Irish peasant girl does not lose all her early training at once, and to Lizzie there was something altogether wrong in the arrangements of Providence.

IV.

A LOWERING SKY

It was five o'clock and already growing dark, when Janet came out of Varek's and hurried off toward home. All day the snow-clouds had hung low, gathering under them, as under a wet blanket, the black volumes of smoke belched upward out of thousands of grimy chimneys. There was no wind to stir the smoke, and the flakes of soot fell softly, gathering in little ridges in every corner, or were swept here and there by the quickly moving throng. No one cared to stand still that day—it was so cold—a damp, sodden sort of cold, that found the very marrow.

Thanksgiving day had dawned in an almost Indian-summer warmth, but had closed in a whirl of snow and wind, and the smiling days of autumn were over. Slush and ice, wind and snow, and many such gloomy days as the one just drawing to a close, had filled up the time until Christmas, and old Missourians predicted an unusually cold winter. The poor heard it with dread, and the well-to-do put up storm-doors and laid in a plentiful supply of coal.

Janet determined to walk as long as she could stand the cold, for she had learned to take every

opportunity offered her for exercise. She was bent on trying to husband the strength left her after the demands of the working day, and above all to keep well. Night after night now, when she entered the dark hall and climbed the gloomy stairway of the place she called home, she took up a burden much heavier than any work required at Varek's, for things had not gone well with the Carews. Mrs. Carew had been very ill after the winter set in, and the mending had been very slow, so slow that Janet had almost despaired of her gaining back strength enough to move about their rooms. She was more helpless than Paul now, for she could not even read.

As Janet hurried along it was of Paul she was thinking. He was a goad that touched the very quick of her. Day after day he sat in his wheeling-chair, to her always reserved and cold, lifting no edge of the curtain that hid from her what might be passing in his mind. The only look of pleasure she could ever win from him, was when she laid some book or magazine on the arm of his chair, and then it was not for her, Janet knew, but for what she brought. Reading was his passion, and his taste ran in strange channels.

A long time before, Janet and her mother had found that the boy was poring over the remnant of a medical library that had in some way become part of the Carew possessions, and ever since he had

manifested the keenest interest in medical literature; not as a study, Janet concluded after long observation, but with a morbid craving to brood over the sufferings and abnormalities to which flesh is heir. It was horrid to her, this conclusion, and she carefully kept it from her mother, as she endeavored to keep from her everything that was painful. But the fact remained, that this was the only joy left to the pale, sharp-featured boy, who for more than two years now had been able to do no more than drag himself, by aid of his crutches, from his bed to his chair, and only occasionally from one room to another.

Much as she hated it, Janet was forced out of very pity for his long weary days, to supply him with this sort of reading matter. New books or journals had become much too expensive for her meagre purse, but she knew every second-hand book-store in the city by this time, and on their dusty shelves, or tucked away in some black corner, she often found what she wanted.

This evening she stopped at a shabby little newsstand that she passed every day on her walk up and down North Broadway. Squeezing herself between the two or three rough tables that stood practically on the sidewalk, she made her way into the narrow passage beyond. It was a queer place and had evidently once been the hallway of a house. The rest of the place had been put to other uses and given an-

other entrance, but the bent old man who crouched over the hot stove at the end of the passage had found a way of utilizing this bit of space. The walls on either side were lined with shelves from the ceiling to the floor; they were so crammed and heaped with books that Janet when she entered here always looked up, dreading an avalanche of dusty volumes. The shelves stopped a few feet from the stove, leaving an open space, and here were two chairs and a table—a sort of sitting-room for old Hedrick.

Janet had often been here and for a few cents had picked up bits of reading matter. Old Hedrick knew a lot about books, the latest as well as the oldest, and on the pleasant autumn evenings when she had a half-hour to spare, she would spend it gladly, listening to him. As he came to know her better, he often loaned her books, and she had finally confided to him the reason of her constant quest for medical literature.

"I was afraid it was for yourself you wanted it," he had said, peering at her from under his white brows. "I should hate to see you with a fancy like that."

He was an unusual looking old man, bent and thin, with a head of snow-white hair that contrasted strangely with his brilliant dark eyes. Age had not dimmed them, and there was something compelling in their intent gaze, but Janet had an instinctive recognition for genuine kindliness, and she had under-

stood the look he gave her. From that day Paul had been supplied.

To-night she was stopping for some of the journals, and the old man looked keenly at her as he prepared to give her the package. "You better sit there by the fire a minute," he said, gravely. "You look nearly done. I know the look." Under the flaring gas-jet she looked pinched and blue.

His manner moved her strangely, and she was drawn to stay. To be able to tell even this bent old man a little of the wretched anxieties that awaited her at home would be a relief; it might leave her somewhat more courage to face that worse fear that had begun to sit daily beside her at the office. At least such a thought crossed her mind—but time, where was the time to talk? She was needed at home at that moment.

"No, thank you," she said, "I must go;" but she gave him the pretty smile that she always had for him, even if it were only as she hurried by. She took the package and went on her way, her thoughts for company.

It was at the beginning of December that Mrs. Carew had been taken ill, and Janet's November salary, already depleted by absolutely necessary purchases for their winter comfort, was gone in a week. There had been medicines to buy, the doctor to pay, and coal, coal, always coal. Those had been bad days for her, for they had been in want.

White and sick with sleeplessness and anxiety, the girl had crept to her work at the office, and Varek, who had come to watch every change in her face with an interest that grew keener as time went on, judged its expression correctly. Almost without knowing it, Janet had allowed him to draw from her the story of her mother's illness. He did not ask her if they were in need, nor did she tell him, but he had said in his incisive way, "You ought to have told me before. Now I know from some pretty sharp experiences that a penny in time is sometimes worth nine thousand too late—so I am going to hand you your salary for this month right now. Use it and don't worry—there's plenty more where that came from," he said, as Janet, pink with relief, tried to thank him. She did not find words, but the light in her eyes, into which Varek looked rather hungrily, was more than words.

But in the joy of knowing that that night's supper lay in her hand, she forgot a few things. More than once they had made her turn restlessly on her pillow. They had been scarcely tangible, but she could not brush away the impressions. She had been supersensitive, she told herself, since that unspeakable day when she had stood at bay in Bronson's inner office. Every inch of her body burned, as the disgust, contempt, and fury she had felt, swept over her in recollection.

He had shot a bolt out of a clear sky, that *Thing,*

with its livid face and bald head, that had called itself her father's friend, and had dared, *dared* to say to her what it did, making itself more persistently plain to her ignorance and innocence. With every drop of her blood boiling she had faced him, the Irish tongue of her father and the facile French inheritance of her mother lending her their aid. Then she had seen him droop and wilt, all the pompous pretense gone—just a withered, bad old man.

The moments that had followed Janet would never forget. As she stood, her anger cooling into a settled loathing, she heard repeated again and again the abject apology for his words. It was useless to ask her to forget, but as the minutes passed, the cunning of a mind rarely at a loss reasserted itself, and Janet found herself listening to the story of a bit of her father's life that none but this man knew.

"You are capable of lying to me," said the girl. "I do not believe what you are telling me."

Then he laid before her a packet of letters, and Janet knew that he was telling her the truth. She could bear that knowledge, for she must, but her mother could not.

"Why have you shown these to me?" she asked, looking him in the eye, and he answered smoothly, "Because you said I was no friend of your father's, and there you wronged me. I have shielded him, I shielded him for years. I saw that no hint of it ever

reached your mother's ears. You had a right to say to me what you did—there are few men, Janet, that are not mad for a moment some time in their lives; when you are older you will know it better. Never as long as I live will I forgive myself; but in spite of it, I tell you I have had your father's interests, your mother's, and yours always at heart."

Behind the white mask of her face Janet was thinking, and the man before her saw it. He waited a little, then, "These letters," he said, slowly, tapping them where they lay under his hand—"these letters would kill your mother."

The girl's eyes asked him the question her lips would not, and he answered, "I want you to forget to-day. Let us wipe it out. I will keep out of your way, and I want you to come to the office as usual. Your leaving would only cause comment, and your mother, whom we both want to shield, would wonder. I am going to Europe before long, and when I go I will find a place for you; not one you will feel any necessity of keeping, however, if you do not wish. After what has passed I feel that I owe you every consideration."

His flow of words stopped at last, and Janet answered him steadily. "Very well—may I go now?" He unlocked the door and she passed out, but she went oblivious of his proffered hand. He kept his word; her mother was left in peace, and she had done her

work as usual, but her faith in much that she would as soon have thought of questioning as any of the settled facts of nature, was gone.

That men were given their strength to protect weakness, not to prey upon it, had been a part of her creed. That henceforth she must go armed, not only to win her daily bread, but also to keep unsullied her womanhood, was a new thought to her. Hers was not a silly or a stupid brain, and, except when too hard driven by anxiety for those she loved, very clear-sighted. As she observed life about her she began to have a fuller understanding of the natural temptations that come to men and to women as well, and she saw daily the ever-compelling power of money. Janet had learned her first unlovely lesson, and it left her doubtful and timid.

It frightened and oppressed her, as did the huge buildings, and the hurrying crowds—as did Varek the first day she entered his office. His air of unopposed power, the strength of his big body, and the knife-like glance of his eye, all made her feel infinitely small and helpless; he appeared to her to personify the hardness and unscrupulousness of the street. Her determination to make of herself just a bit of office furniture, a mere machine, was only strengthened; in so far as she could she would cease to be a personality, and thus she might escape notice. That Varek would quickly seek to dominate anything, even

a stenographer, that in anywise obtruded itself, she felt quite certain.

To her infinite relief he had met her fully half way in her endeavor to efface herself. He gave her plenty to do in a perfectly businesslike manner; in the time they spent together, he at his desk, she at hers, he attempted only the most casual conversation; she was conscious of the comprehensive scrutiny that he frequently bestowed upon her, but his interest was not expressed in words, and she strove not to notice it. To go quietly in and out, to do her day's work well, and give satisfaction, was all she wanted. Her interests were back in that high-ceilinged room with its two occupants, and when she rose from her desk in the evening it was with the one wish to get back to them as soon as possible.

It had annoyed her that Braun and Ehrenstein had both tried to engage her in conversation. Varek had come in suddenly one day, and found Ehrenstein lounging by her desk. He had come into Varek's private office with a question that Janet knew was nothing but an excuse, and she felt that he had no business there. Varek had made some indifferent remark, and Ehrenstein had soon departed, but with the instinct of the sensitive, she knew Varek was angry. She prayed silently it was not with her. Two days later he changed her work room. He had risen from his desk with his characteristic abruptness, and opened

a door into a room that she had never seen until that day, and before she knew what he was about, he had swept her and the typewriter into it.

"There, Mistress Peggy," said he, looking at her surprised face with smiling eyes, "you can hammer away by yourself in here. I am tired of the sound of that thing."

It was the first time he had called her anything but Miss Carew, and though she noticed it she showed no sign. Then too she was surprised at the room in which they were. It was not large but it was beautifully furnished, panelled in dark wood, and hung with pictures that Janet's good taste told her were valuable. The oriental rugs were soft in color, and the light from the two windows was subdued by the red curtains to a rosy glow. There was a fireplace in which was laid an unlighted wood fire, and a tea-table with an oddly-shaped brass kettle stood near the fireplace. Several comfortable chairs, a table, and a wide couch piled with cushions, completed the furnishing.

"It's my den, or thinking place, or anything you have a mind to call it," said Varek, answering her look. "Do you like it?"

"It is charming," said Janet. "I like the pictures—and the color of everything."

He looked pleased. "I will tell you about the pictures some times," he said. "Now I am going to draw

back this curtain and give you a decent light. There are some men coming to a meeting in the office there, but when they're off, I will open the door; meantime you can work in peace."

Janet had expected to move back the next day, but Varek said, "No, stay where you are," and it became her work room. He kept the door into his office partly open, but Janet saw no one who entered. Her desk was in the corner by the window, and Varek brought her work to her.

So day after day passed, and gradually Varek's attitude to her changed. At first he rarely left impersonal ground, but spasmodically, and as it pleased him, he talked a good deal to her. She learned the city and its history from him—then he would tell her bits of his own experience, for he appeared to have travelled his country over thoroughly. Varek was a good talker in his own terse fashion, and Janet could not withhold her interest in much that he told her. She liked him in these moods, but not as much as she feared him in others. Carefully as she guarded her speech, she was more than once beguiled into references to herself, particularly to her childhood, the one happy period of her life. But they were her only lapses.

The days lengthened into weeks, and Varek spent more and more time in her presence, and she was nervously conscious of the fact. Sometimes he would

stretch himself on the couch near her, silently smoking, his regard on her; or he might choose to talk, but what he had to say was in character with the warm luxury of the room in which she spent so many hours. He kept a bright fire on the hearth, and flowers at her elbow. He often came in and busied himself in his deft way at the tea-table; it seemed to the tired girl that the fragrant cup of tea that he gave her was the one thing that enabled her to accomplish her weary walk homeward. If he was deliberately seeking to emphasize the contrast between that warm room and the dingy, cold place to which she nightly hurried, he certainly succeeded.

There was no direct word or act that she could complain of, but she began to feel a pressure upon her like a heavy hand on her shoulder, and it could not be shaken off. She lived with her eyes still more determinedly on her work, but sometimes when Varek dictated to her, his arm on the back of her chair, his head bent close to hers, she had been surprised into meeting his eyes, and then it was that she carried home with her an impression that drove sleep from her pillow.

And now she owed him money that she had not earned, and worse, it was almost gone; if before the first of the month he chose to offer her her next month's pay, she would be forced to take it. Even to Janet's inexperience it began to be plain that her

earnings could not be made to cover their needs. She knew perfectly well that such a position as she was capable of filling was almost impossible to find, yet as things were tending, how long would it be before she would have to join that army that was forever "looking for work"? "What will become of us?" said the voice that would not be silent in the night, and as she walked on under the lowering sky it repeated itself to her—"What will become of us?—What will become of us?"

V.

THE HIGH-CEILINGED ROOM

At Lizzie's door Janet paused, but the rough tones of a man's voice raised in anger reached her, and sighing heavily she went on upstairs. If things had not gone well with the Carews neither had they with Lizzie. Patrick had "lost his job," and he also was "looking for work."

"Whin Patrick is wurrukin' there's no stiddier man on earth," Lizzie said, "but whin his big hands lays by him idle, an' th' childher are in need,—thin, Miss Jannie, it's th' dhrink," and it was the drink just now with Patrick.

Before her own door Janet waited a moment, a pause that had become second nature to her now, a sort of lingering behind the scenes for a second to assume the correct expression and attitude before stepping out into public view. The bright look that she brought in with her was for Paul and the cheer in her voice for the blind woman, and they were both received in the usual manner; Paul looked up without speaking, and Mrs. Carew's arms went round her daughter, drawing the girl's soft cheek and warm lips against her own.

"Tired, Jannie?" she asked, tenderly, and Janet murmured back, "Mummie, Mummie, sitting up!

You pert little thing! How long has she been misbehaving?" she asked, getting up from her mother's chair and smiling at Paul.

"Most of the afternoon," said he, his cold look softening as his eyes rested with Janet's on his mother. If there was a human being besides himself to whom Paul was capable of giving a loving thought, it was his mother. She suffered as he did, and from the same cause, and she never touched the raw wound that Janet's warm health and beauty were always probing.

"I will have supper in a minute," Janet said as she took off her coat and hat, "and, mother, when I am ready I am going to pull your chair with you in it, into the kitchen. I must take off my dress first."

"I am sorry you have to build a fire in that cold room, Jannie," said Mrs. Carew. "It is so dreadfully cold."

"Have you been cold in here?" the girl asked, anxiously.

Paul did not answer for he was already deep in the journals, but Mrs. Carew laughed with a light lift of her shoulders. "We haven't spent much time sitting by the window," she said. "The stove can't complain of being neglected." There was a vivacity in every movement and word of Mrs. Carew's that no amount of illness or misfortune could banish, and one forgot the blank look of her dark eyes in watching her

little gesturing hands; there was something so delicate and bird-like in her quick movements. Her small pinched face retained little of the petite, brunette beauty that had charmed Denis Carew. He had met her in New Orleans, and courted, won, and married her in his usual impetuous fashion. She had been reared in the seclusion customary in French families, and it was little more than a child in years and knowledge that he had brought back with him to his Virginia home.

There, save for the occasional visits and still rarer festivities among the few old families about them, Mrs. Carew had spent her married life, and had been content in her home and her children, until the great misfortune came. The overwhelming sorrows of the last six years had brought to the surface of her nature traits that no one would have suspected in the pretty, incapable little creature. The mother love in her had risen and drowned out everything else. It had begun when she had realized what Janet was suffering, and she had taken the child close into her heart. To Paul she gave ceaseless love, consideration, and sympathy, for she had a vague understanding of the sick soul that lay under his frozen manner.

Of the life that Janet had entered upon, its cold matter of fact, its cruelty to the weak and grudging approbation of the strong, its temptations and its trials, she had about as much conception as a little

child. For a woman to earn her bread was hard, for one so gently reared as Janet it must be doubly so, Mrs. Carew thought, and so much the more reason was there for showing her daughter every tenderness. Mrs. Carew was not a clever woman, but she was capable of a thoroughly unselfish and rather helpless affection, and her appeal to Janet had always been the stronger for that reason. If Mrs. Carew's mental capacity was not of the highest, her innate refinement was unquestionable, and even in the midst of her misfortunes she had not lost the pretty, dainty manner that had been one of her charms as a girl.

Janet had drawn her mother's chair into the next room as she had said, and there followed the hour that both loved. Mrs. Carew would give the history of her day, and Janet an expurgated recital of hers. Even in her state of anxiety, the girl let little escape her that might serve to interest and amuse her mother. She had naturally a quick perception of the humorous and was a good mimic, and in reacting for her mother's benefit some incident that had struck her, she would forget for a time the disagreeable things she was pondering.

To-night Mrs. Carew was eager to talk, her sentences coming quick and short. "It is news about Paul," she said. "He had a caller. It was this morning—a man who has taken a room on this floor—

at the end of the hall. They came in here and talked some time. Paul says he is a doctor. Then this afternoon Paul went to see him—clear down the hall.—No, he had no help," Mrs. Carew said in answer to Janet's exclamation of surprise. "He went slowly, but he went quite by himself."

"Why, mother, he has not walked that far for years!" said Janet. "Can it really mean that he is better? How glad I should be," she said, longingly.

"He spent a long time with that man," remarked Mrs. Carew.

"How strange! He has never taken the least interest in any one before. Mother, could you tell anything about the man?" asked Janet.

"No, he was not in my room at all. He had been smoking, even Paul's clothes were full of it."

"Well," said Janet doubtfully, "that *is* news. It would do Paul good to have an interest, if——" but she did not go on. Instead she asked, "Have you seen Lizzie to-day?"

"She came in just before you did," said her mother. "Denis was sent home ill from the kindergarten, and Lizzie left the laundry early."

"Did Lizzie say he was very sick?" asked Janet, anxiously.

Mrs. Carew laughed. "Lizzie said it was an 'ilephant iv a fright and a mouse iv a stummickache!' —but she was here only a minute."

"I will go down after supper," said Janet. There was silence for a time and then the girl said hesitatingly, "Mother, there is a janitor's place I should like so much to ask Mr. Varek for, for Patrick—but I do hate so to ask a favor."

"It would be a Godsend to them," said Mrs. Carew, "and certainly he would not mind—he seems to be a kind man. Think of all that fruit, and the beautiful flowers he sent when I was ill. I shall never forget that great magnolia blossom! Why, Jannie, I knew it was there the instant Lizzie brought it inside the door. I put it on the pillow against my face, and I was just a little girl, back there on the plantation, and old Mammy waking me up by putting one over my face—'*Levez vous, ma petite!*'—I can hear her now. It was a good deal better than medicine," a flush rose to Mrs. Carew's thin cheek.

Janet's eyes filled with sudden tears, but she shrugged them away with a gesture that was very like her mother's light lift of the shoulders. "Well, mummie," said she, "you can't have all the fruit and flower experiences. I came home this evening with an immense apple tree."

"What do you mean, dear?" said Mrs. Carew, instantly diverted.

"A huge, live, angry apple tree."

"You want me to ask you questions, but I won't do it."

"It talked."

"And walked—go on, Jannie!"

"It was really funny, though, mother. I got on the car at Hibbert this evening, for it was too cold to go on walking, and I had those papers to carry, and of course all the seats were full. I went up to about the middle of the car and stood up. Then two men who were nearer the door got up, and a queer, sharp-looking, little man who was standing near me made a dive to get the seat. At the same time, mummie, a big dark woman who was standing at the door made for it, and they came together. She plunged like an elephant into the seat, and the shove she gave the little man sent him clear up to me again; he bounced back like a ball, though, and got the little corner of seat the fat lady didn't cover. She seemed to be in a great fume. She was turned about beckoning to another big Jewish lady who was at the door. 'Come hier, Mrs. Apfelbaum, come,' she called out. 'You should haf dis seat!' and she glared at the little man beside her, but he never paid the least attention. All the rest of us were smiling except Mrs. Apfelbaum. 'Nein, Mrs. Rich,' she said, scornfully; 'when those what are younger than I, they sit—then I stand.'

"Just then the conductor came for their fares, and Mrs. Rich seemed to be having a terrible time. She searched all about in her bundles, and then

dumped them over on the little man's lap, and tried to get up and look under her seat. Then he got up, holding her bundles, and she looked under him. 'Mrs. Rich,' Mrs. Apfelbaum called out from the door, 'haf you lost somedings?'

"'Ja,' said Mrs. Rich, 'it is my nickel—it is gone!' and she looked at the little man.

"'Ach,' said Mrs. Apfelbaum, 'dat is too bad;' but she didn't offer to lend her one, mother. Then the little man spoke, and he had such a great deep voice for his small body. 'Madam,' he said to Mrs. Rich, 'I think your nickel rolled away forward under those seats, but if you to-night, just as soon as you get home, will sit down and write to this street-car company, they will search for and find your nickel, and return it to you.'

"Mrs. Rich gave him a sharp look, but he just looked solemnly back at her. 'Vell, den,' she said, 'I vill find annodder,' and she plumped herself down in her seat, and hauled up her skirt, and brought out a nickel from her underskirt pocket. 'You find the odder!' she said to the conductor. Every one was laughing by that time, mother, and the little man gave Mrs. Rich her bundles. 'Allow me, Madam,' he said to Mrs. Apfelbaum, and then he got off the car."

Mrs. Carew laughed heartily. "Jannie, what queer things you see. Do you think she will write for her nickel?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said the girl, stifling a sigh; "that was really funny, though, this evening—I couldn't help laughing myself."

Later on Janet went down to Lizzie. Patrick was gone, she knew only too well where, and Lizzie sat holding the baby and watching Denis as he slept. She looked very tired, and her face was if possible thinner; in the dim light her scrawny features looked grotesque, but she had a smile for Janet.

"Give him to me," whispered the girl, motioning to her lap; "he is too heavy for you."

Lizzie handed the baby over and the two sat close together. "Is Denis better?" asked Janet.

"Yis, he's all right now," said Lizzie, and tired and worn though she was, her blue eyes twinkled with some of her usual humor. "I came in here in a fright as ye may know, Miss Jannie, an' there was th' little devil with his mouth standin' wide an' his legs doubled up. 'Dinis, me pet, where is it yer pain is, thin?' I asked.

" 'In me heart, mither,' says he, yellin' th' worse.

" 'In yer heart!' says I fair frighted. 'Put yer hand on th' place, thin, darlin'.'

" 'It's here, mither,' said he, his eyes streamin'; an' he laid his hand right on th' top iv his little stummick." Janet laughed softly, her lips against the baby's hair.

"'An' that's not all iv it,'" continued Lizzie. "'I wint round here loike a whirlwind, tho' I had to laugh a bit, and prisently I had a hot dhrink f'r him. 'Here, Dinis,' says I, 'ye take this. It will dhraw away all th' pain, darlin', an' put ye to sleep.' Thin he shut up his mouth. 'Na, na, mither, I wull not!' says he, chokin'. 'I wunt, I wunt.'

"'Now,' says I, me patience nearly exhausted, 'it's this very instant ye'll drink it, Dinis McGinniss, an' I say it!' With that, Miss Jannie, he turned black entoirely, an' I saw it wasn't th' pain, it was clear frighted th' child was.

"'Dinis, will ye explain yersilf, thin?' I asked.

"'Ach, mither,' he cried, very piteous, 'it's what they did to Adam! Don't ye please, mither, do it!'

"'Dinis, are ye outside iv yer head?'" says I.

"'Na, they did it!' he says. 'They gived him somethin' that putted him to sleep, mither, an' then they cutted out his rib.'

"'Dinis,' said I, sittin' down quite sudden, 'what praist telled ye that?'

"'There didn't any praist telled me,' says he, snifflin'; 'they telled me at th' kindergarten.'

"'Now,' says I, very positive, 'ye hear yer mither —whin th' praist tells ye sich a thing it's toime ye belave it, but at th' kindergarten they tells ye more than yer little head can hold. Don't ye worry, Dinis. It's yer mither will look after yer ribs, an' see no wan

gets thim.'—It's f'r th' childher wan's heart is heavy whin there's throuble," sighed Lizzie, "but there's comfort in thim too sometoimes."

Janet sat silent, thinking over again the opportunity of helping Lizzie. She had considered it for several days and was tempted to plead for Patrick, in spite of her better judgment. Her request would be granted, that she knew; it was that certainty that made her so reluctant to ask.

"Lizzie, do you still have that pain in your side all of the time?" she asked.

"Yis," said the woman. "Miss Jannie, I pray on me knees ivery night Patrick may get wurruk—I can't kape up much longer."

"I know he will," said Janet, with sudden decision.

"What do ye mean, Miss Jannie?" asked the woman, surprised at her tone.

"Just that I feel sure he will. Shall I put the baby on the bed for you? I must go back to mother." Lizzie put back the covers, and Janet laid the baby beside Denis. Mary and Patty were sleeping in the front room that served for living room and kitchen as well; the third room had been given up some time ago.

At the door Janet stopped and put her arm around the elder woman's shoulders. "Don't worry to-night, Lizzie, things may look better to-morrow." Lizzie

did not answer, perhaps she could not. The girl was about to open the door, when she remembered one of the reasons that had brought her down to Lizzie's rooms.

"There is a new roomer on our floor, Lizzie, do you know anything about him?"

"Th' midical man?" said Lizzie. "No, an' I don't want to. If it's medicine he's after practisin' he takes quare ways iv doin' it."

"What do you mean, Lizzie?" the girl asked, anxiously.

"Don't ye worry yer pretty head, dearie. He's jist a wild wan, and not f'r th' loikes iv ye," the woman answered, wisely.

"You foolish thing," said Janet. "I wasn't thinking of myself;" but she did not explain about Paul.

VI.

JANET ASKS A FAVOR

NEW-YEAR'S DAY had come and gone, and Janet was glad the holidays were over. The temptations of the gay shop-windows, in face of the bare unloveliness at home, had been trying, and the jostling, busy crowd that had daily elbowed her so closely had almost driven her into unsavory side-streets. For days about Union Market it had been almost impossible to push her way. Now there was a lull.

Several days had passed since she had decided to speak for Patrick, but she had not done it yet. Varek had been more preoccupied than usual, but there had been opportunities, and yet she had kept silent. This morning she felt she must speak. She could not bear the trouble in poor Lizzie's face any longer, and if she must do it, the sooner the better.

When she came into the office, she found Varek already there, tipped back in his chair and doing nothing in particular, unless the frown on his brow meant disagreeable thoughts. She took off her coat and hat, and gathering together her resolution approached him.

"Are you very busy, Mr. Varek, just now?" she asked. "Could I speak to you about something?"

He brought his chair down instantly, and turned

a surprised look on her. When he saw her expression, and the color that came into her face at his look, his brows unbent and a line of satisfaction appeared about his mouth. Janet, as she had thought of the interview, had seen exactly that look on his face. The knowledge that it would appear was one of the things that had withheld her.

"What is it, Peggy?" he said.

"It's about the janitor's place at your flat building—I mean where the fire was," explained Janet, for some reason finding the chair-back her hand was grasping a welcome support. "I wondered if you would consider giving it to a man I know who is a very faithful, good workman. He has been out of work, and they are having a hard time. His wife is ill, too."

"There are a good many men out of work just now," said Varek, tentatively, his eyes on her face. He was not going to make it easy for her, then, and she had known he would not.

"His wife used to work for us," Janet continued, "and I know what good honest people they are. Patrick is one of those men who think of their employers' interests first, and I don't believe a fire like that at the flats would happen if he were looking after a place; he is very careful."

Varek wore an unconvinced air. He took up a pencil, turning it thoughtfully in his fingers. "I

don't know," he said; "there are a dozen men for the place—men I have employed before." It was only a a day or two before that she had heard him say that he didn't know an honest man for the place.

He would force her to it then, make her put her request in the form he desired. The hot blood came into her face. "I am very fond of his wife," she said then, with a certain clearness of enunciation, "and I should be very grateful to you if you did find you could help them—I am afraid I am asking a favor."

He flashed her a look that held several expressions, as he answered quickly, "Certainly he shall have the place if it means anything to you. I would go a long day's journey to do you a favor, little Peggy." He had risen as he spoke, and with the suddenness that characterized all of his movements, he bent and brushed back from her cheek a strand of hair that lay on it. The motion spoke volumes.

Janet started back and for a moment her eyes flamed at him, her hand at her cheek; but he gazed at her steadily, and made no excuse, and she got back into her own room. She lifted the cloth cover from the typewriter with trembling hands. Fool that she was—what had she expected? Did she think she could touch fire and not be burned? What had it been since she entered that office but one long struggle between them? She had not lifted her eyes, she had

been purposely blind, and deaf, and dumb—to herself —to him—knowing one thing, striving to think another. For some reason of his own he had withheld his hand so far, but he knew her fear, and her necessity, or she had been all wrong in the reading of some things. Driven almost frantic at home, full of terror here—it was beyond human endurance.

But what could she do? Hers was the kind of position given to the favored people. She was incapable of doing what those two girls in the outer office were doing. That took business training and was paid in proportion. On a salary such as that they could live and even pay some doctor's bills, but what was forty dollars a month to three people, and two of them invalids! She had been mad—no, just ignorant—when she had dreamed that they could manage on it, even in those three miserable rooms. Yesterday she had paid her rent and given up Paul's room. Every month Mr. Bronson had handed her twenty-five dollars more than her salary. "Just let it run," he had said; "we will straighten things out some time"—and she had taken it like a child. It had made things possible for them, but she knew better now.

Round and round the miserable, familiar circle, her thoughts travelled, and came back to the usual starting point. She must bear it here until it became impossible and then try elsewhere. She had few

opportunities to even hear of any other position possible to her, but she must use every effort. In the meantime she would push economy still further, but she would not ask herself how long they could stand it.

Her head pained her intolerably, just the constant boring pain at the back of her eyeballs, become sharper. More than once in the night watches it had obtruded itself that she might, if her racking anxiety continued, become too ill to work. The thought was ghastly. As her trembling fingers sorted over the papers on her desk, she saw an envelope addressed to herself. It was just the usual business envelope of the firm, and before her fingers touched its thickness, she knew what was in it—her salary given her early again. She loathed the sight of the money, much as it meant to her. She tore off the end of the envelope and saw the folded bills—and now she would have to thank him. She thrust it into the front of her dress and clasping her head in her hands and setting her teeth she tried to calm herself. Whatever she did, she must not have a fit of the nerves, for what possible good would it do?

She had time to quiet herself, for Varek had closed the door between them and she heard the voices of Braun and Ehrenstein. For some days there had been a tense atmosphere at Varek's, and Janet knew that some enterprise of moment was occupying the energies of the firm. The three had

met several times in conference, and scraps of conversation had reached her through the closed door. Ehrenstein's voice in particular, bearing clearly in its excitement the characteristic thick nasal intonation of his race. She could see his typically Semitic face alive with the one all-absorbing interest, his shoulders shrugging, his palms outspread. "What we have paid for, that we should have," came distinctly to her now, and Varek's cutting, "They have me to deal with, they would better look out."

For some reason the words touched a strong fibre of resistance in her and she stiffened as she sat. Did he think all the world feared him? Did that thin-lipped blonde woman, his wife, whose cold eye had rested so indifferently for a moment on her, fear him too? Janet had drawn back to the curb one rainy afternoon as Mrs. Varek swept by her in her cushion-tired carriage, and as she labored for an hour that night to remove from her skirt the mud thrown from the wheels she had wondered. A feeling of dull defiance of fate and of him rose in her. It nerved her to look him in the face when he came in and she thought that she had never seen him look so grim.

His black brows were drawn down into almost a straight line, and his eyes looked out from under them with the blue-gray glint of a steel blade. His lips, that generally showed some red under his heavy mustache, were so firmly pressed as not to be seen and

his heavy jaw was set like iron. He merely glanced at her, and began slowly walking back and forth, the length of his office and her room. He seemed to be plunged in one of his reveries, but he did not ask her to stop her noisy machine, so she went on.

Presently he came in with some papers. "Will you please make a careful list of these, the dates and amounts, and the names?" he said. "No, not typewritten," he added, quickly, as Janet turned to the desk. "I want quiet." He stretched himself on the couch flat on his back, drew toward him a little table that held his cigars and ash-tray, and lighted a cigar.

"Perhaps I would disturb you less if I sat in the next room," ventured Janet. She would have much preferred the other room.

He turned his head toward her with a look that unbent his brows. "Don't leave, please," he said, his black look gone. "I have two hours in which to save a situation—that is, if I think straight; if your corner were empty I might think of that." He looked quizzically at her under the hand that was holding his lighted cigar. "If you don't mind, keep as quiet as possible, though." Janet did not answer, and he turned his head away, put the cigar between his lips, and folding his hands on his broad chest, lay perfectly still.

An hour passed, and a second—the noon whistles

blew, the fire burned itself out, but Varek did not stir, except to knock the ash from his cigar, and when that was smoked, to light another, and still another. Janet wearily went on with her task. She felt numb to her finger-tips. It was long past her lunch hour, when she daily forced herself to walk round the block and swallow a bad cup of tea,—one of the luxuries that her new program must not include,—and she began to realize that it would have been better for her if she had had something more substantial than just coffee for breakfast. She had had a bad night, and the thought of food had been repellent to her, as it was now, but she felt weak and dizzy. Her work swam before her eyes and she wrote with difficulty, but at last it was done and she could lay her head back and rest.

Some time later on Varek raised himself and sat up. He wore an alertly-pleased look, as if he had passed his time to some purpose, but as his eye sought the clock and Janet's corner, he drew his lips in an inaudible whistle. Getting up softly he crossed the floor to her chair.

She sat with her head slightly thrown back and her eyes closed, her hands resting on the leather covered arms of her chair. Her colorless lips were a little parted, as if a breath had escaped from them and no other would follow to stir with a semblance of life the deadly paleness of her face. There was some-

thing terrifying in the blue shadows under her eyes and her perfect stillness.

"My God!" said Varek, suddenly white. "Peggy!" He bent down and touched her as if he might find her cold, but her heavy lashes lifted and she looked blankly into his terrified face. "What is it?" he asked, huskily. "Are you ill?"

"No," she said, dully; "I was—resting—I—think."

"Resting!" said Varek. "God, I thought—had you fainted?"

"I am all right," said Janet, determinedly dragging herself to her feet. "I may have been asleep——" and she tried to stand, but clutched at the chair.

Varek lifted her like a child and set her down. Then seizing the spirit bottle that stood on the table, he poured out some brandy into a glass. "Oh, you damned brute, you!" he said between his teeth. "You damned brute."

He knelt beside her and put the glass to her lips. "Take a mouthful, little one," he begged. "It will do you more good than anything."

Janet had never fainted in her life, but she thought she was going to now, and she was frightened beyond anything. There was a black mist before her eyes, and a leaden weight on her head. The strong stuff she swallowed burned her tongue and throat like fire, but it brought back her fading consciousness.

She sat gasping for a time, and then she stiffened in the arm Varek had put around her and drew herself out of his hold. "I am better now," she said. "Mr. Varek, could you, if you would, get me something to eat?"—anything to give her time to recover herself. He got up at once and went to the telephone, then coming back he lighted the brass kettle and while she was still trying to steady herself he brought her a cup of tea.

He sat watching her as her trembling hand lifted the spoon to her lips, and the hard shrewd lines in his face softened. "Peggy, I thought I had lost you," he said; but it was characteristic of the man that he made no apology. Some hot toast and a bowl of soup arrived, and Varek brought it to her, and saw her eat, but it was not until some color returned to her face, and she leaned back with a sigh, that he spoke.

"How long can you stand this sort of thing, Peggy?" he asked. "Are you going to let me stand by and see you kill yourself? You are as out of place in this life you have been forced into, as a little delicate flower, and you will go under. You know just as well as I that any time these last two months you could have had my help—but you would none of it."

"I would have no right to ask you for help," said Janet in a low voice. "If you felt kindly toward me, and I could do my work, it was all I could ask, and

it was all I wanted. You have been kind in paying me before I had earned it, and I think you have saved Lizzie's life. You have helped me, helped me very much."

He was leaning over her, his hand on the back of her chair, but he straightened and lifted his shoulders as she spoke, his face darkening. "Do you call that help?" said he. "Peggy, you don't know me. There is such a thing as common sense—then use it. Your situation is what it is, and you can't change it; why not then make the best of it? Instead, you have persistently put aside the friendship I have offered you. You have made it plain enough every day that you would not have me for—in any capacity."

"You are my employer," said Janet, her voice growing firmer, "and if you will also really be a friend to us, my mother, and Paul, and me, we will be grateful to you as long as we live—I think you have always known that." She had spoken before without meeting his eyes, but now she turned and looked into his face.

Varek met her look silently, and though his lips smiled his eyes did not. Then he held out his hand. "Will you shake hands on our friendship then, Peggy?" he asked.

Weak as she was the color rose hot in her cheeks. "No," she said, her eyes dilating.

Varek got up and stood looking down at her, and

there was no lack of admiration in the look. "You may be a child in some ways," he said, "but, Peggy dear, I bow before your intelligence. You fear I might be an exacting friend, and you trust me as little as I trust all womankind, but you——" He stopped, but Janet sat silent, and he continued, "So it is to go on then? I am not easily beaten, Peggy." Then as she did not move nor lift her eyes, Varek bent down and looked into her face. "Wouldn't it be easier to like me a little?" he asked, softly. "Peggy, I am not always a bear."

The girl got up without looking at him and put on her hat with shaking hands. "It is a little early," she said, "but I should like to go home. I don't think I could work any more to-day."

"Work! Of course not!" exclaimed Varek. "But you are not to go that way; you're not fit to walk. I telephoned for a carriage to come at five. Come here, Peggy, and sit down!" but the girl had caught up her coat and was out of the door.

He followed her into the general office, for Janet had chosen that way purposely, instead of the private passage that led to Varek's rooms, but there he stopped. Back again in his own room he put on his coat and hat. "I'll have to follow her," he muttered. "She's too sick to go on the street like that—the plucky little thing! Leo Varek, you are something a good deal worse than a fool!"

VII.

A STENOGRAPHER'S POINT OF VIEW

THE next week passed for Janet in a state of mind, or more correctly speaking of nerves, that she would never have dreamed possible for her. The morning after her scene with Varek she came promptly to her work. She spoke her good-morning distinctly, looking him in the eye, and as she passed into her room and sat at her desk, she held her head high. The weariness of the last weeks seemed to have slipped from her. Her breakfasts were as repellent to her as ever and she slept unrefreshed, but she could walk without tiring and the blood seemed to go faster through her veins.

She had left the office the day before with an overwhelming sense of outrage and her fear was swallowed up in it. Let come what would, he should see that she would neither be driven nor cajoled. He sat secure in his strength and his money, thinking that she must come to his hand, that there was no escape for her. She had been a coward in her terror for those two at home. The time would come—even in her new-born courage she felt that it would come—when she would not know which way to turn, but in the mean time—and with all her wits at work she

would make that mean time as long as possible—Varek should meet his match. Did he think that because she had sat so quietly in his presence she was a fool? Janet would have been no woman if she had not learned in all those weeks that she had a certain power over Varek; it was one of the knowledges that came to Eve when she bit the apple. It had been a terror to her and the cause of all her difficulties, but it had taught her that her place in Varek's office would be hers as long as he could retain her.

That envelope lay as yet untouched in her bureau drawer, her mother seemed slowly to be gathering strength, Paul was occupied with his new friend, and a great happiness reigned in Lizzie's domain. She had a little time in which to breathe and plan.

That afternoon Janet went to Bronson's office to see a girl she had known there. She wanted to learn anything she could of employment agencies for her kind of work, and she thought Amy King could tell her.

She had started as early as possible and found Bronson's office still busy. "Hello!" said Amy, when she came in, "I haven't seen you for a coon's age." She was a big blonde girl, with a fine figure, and a face that would have been very pretty if it had not been too full. She was good-humored and had always been pleasant to Janet, and she could think of no one else to go to. When she left Bronson's office she would have asked Amy to come and see her, but she never

could have presented to her mother Amy's flow of slang and office gossip, and their acquaintance had dropped.

"Sit down," Amy went on. "I'll be through in a minute." She looked up over her work rather curiously at Janet, but she smiled pleasantly enough. There was another girl rattling along on her machine, but she was since Janet's time.

"There," said Amy, "thank goodness!—Miss Jones, have you met Miss Carew? She used to be one of our layout—over to Varek's now."

Miss Jones nodded to Janet, giving her coat and hat a good deal of consideration in the process.

"Come over here," said Amy, "and we can talk." The two girls sat down under one of the windows.

"How are you, Amy?" Janet asked. "Having as good a time as ever?"

"Out of sight!" said Amy. "Say, though, how about yourself? You look like the morning after—been sick?"

"No, I am tired though, and think I may want to make a change," said Janet.

"A change," said the other in surprise,—"heard you had a snap at Varek's!"

"The work isn't hard," Janet explained, "but I want to earn more money if I can. You see, I am not so lucky as you are. Living at home, you don't have any expenses to speak of."

"Goes on my back," laughed Amy. "You do have it kinder hard, though," she continued, "and you ain't like some of 'em. What do you get at Varek's?"

"Forty."

"Phew!" Amy whistled; "and you make two ends meet on that?" She had heard some nasty remarks from the two in the outer office at Varek's, but in a coarse sort of way she was a judge of character, and she liked Janet. She did her the justice of not believing.

"It's about looking for something else that I wanted to see you," said Janet. "You know about employment agencies—do you think I could get anything that way?"

The other shook her head doubtfully. "I don't know about your getting more salary," she said. "You might try for it though; it wouldn't do any harm. To tell you the truth, Janet, your kind of a job ain't easy to get; there're too many looking for snaps; it's your face'll get you in if anything does. Oh, I ain't sayin' anything wrong," she exclaimed, in answer to Janet's flush. "Why look here, when the old man was after some one for May's place, didn't I have fits listening to him over the telephone? 'Very well, very well,' says he, with his shake-out-my-ruffles-and-take-snuff air. 'She must be thoroughly prepossessing in appearance; if she is pretty I will consider her. I make it a rule to have only

good-looking faces in the office. It is merely business,'—and they sent Jones over here, and though she's a cat and shucks at work, she's stayed. Why, I know a girl who's the best stenographer in town, but she's ugly, and she'll have to wait around while baby-snatchers like Jones get in ahead of her."—The baby-snatcher in question had departed.

"It's true, I reckon," said Janet.

"Of course it's true. A lot of it ain't straight, but mostly it's just that men like good looks about 'em. I don't blame a man for preferring to look six days in the week into a pretty face instead of a mug, do you?"

"No," said Janet smiling, "certainly not. But, Amy, give me the names of those agencies, will you?"

"Well there's Burton & Clark—they're the best; then there's Drake & Co. Go to them and tell 'em to look out for something, and you'll call 'em up. Dress up as good as you can and give them your references. Say, though," Amy added, "if you skip Varek's, he won't give you a send off, and the old man's the only other one, and he's away."

"I'll have to do without," said Janet.

"It won't be so easy," Amy rejoined; "but you may have luck."

"You don't know of anything yourself, do you, Amy?"

"Nixie. If I did I'd a told you."

"Well," said Janet, getting up, "I am making you late, Amy, and I thank you ever so much."

"Now look here," Amy said, struck by the other girl's tired face, "don't get down. First thing you know, if I go on getting fat, I'll be coming to you for comfort; the old man'll be looking out for another beauty."

"I wouldn't be afraid of that," smiled Janet, the Irish in her coming to the fore. "That figure of yours will put the rest to shame even when you're sixty."

"Get out!" said Amy, highly pleased. "Say, if I hear of anything I'll get word to you."

"And, Amy, you won't let it get to Varek's, will you? It would only do harm."

"Sure! What do you take me for? I'm no two-face," exclaimed Amy, with scorn.

Janet interviewed Messrs. Burton & Clark, and Drake & Co., and paid her fee. Their verdict was much the same as Amy's, but they would look around for her, and might have a list for her next week. "You don't look up to much hard work," said Mr. Burton; and Drake, whom Janet disliked at sight, remarked that she was "pretty enough for any place."

But each day brought its difficulties at the office. For the first day or two Varek observed Janet with surprised interest, but before the week was out he was stirred completely out of himself. She had made

him white with rage, alive to his finger tips with admiration, and wild for some response to his growing need of her; but above all she had aroused the ugly, fighting man in him, and that was no small part of Varek.

Just how she had done all this, he could not have told, any more than Janet could have told why, with scarcely a word, he had terrified her all those weeks. She was quiet, respectful when she had to speak to him about her work, her eyes met him fairly, but when he sought too much in their depths she gave him her lashes to study. Her hands were steady, her face composed, and of their talk a few days before she seemed to be entirely oblivious.

Twice he could not contain himself and let out something of his feelings, and the girl had answered him like a flash, and her few words cut; then she had walked out of his office, and busied herself over the ledgers in the next room until he should cool down. To Varek's still greater fury, Ehrenstein was simultaneously seized with a desire to consult the same dry columns of figures. It dawned on him that Janet was no longer afraid of him, and why?

He walked his office floor on Saturday night, and swore over his luxurious dinner at the club, of which he partook in solitude. He spent his Sunday asking himself how many kinds of a fool he was that he had never been before. When he had told Ehrenstein

and Braun the result of his financial cogitations a few days before, Ehrenstein had said with genuine admiration, "I'd give every cent I'm worth for your head! How in thunder do you do it? Gee! that's a load off my mind!—and say, but I'll sing light and easy on ' 'Change' to-morrow," and he had swung out humming the well known ' 'Change' lullaby—

"'It sounds to me—
Like a lie!'"

Ehrenstein and Braun were not alone in their appreciation of his iron nerve and level head, and here he was mad over a girl!—and such a little helpless girl too!

Those weeks of intercourse, one-sided though it was, had had their effect upon Varek. In the beginning it was a mixture of motives that had made him wish to keep the girl to himself, and among these curiosity was perhaps the strongest. From the day that Janet had first entered his presence, there had been a reason for his interest in her that was entirely aside from her personal attraction, though his almost oriental appreciation of form and color had instantly granted to her beauty the recognition it deserved. As time passed Varek's rather complicated motives resolved themselves into a single desire, and with Varek, to wish for a thing meant to set about procuring it.

To take what he could get by any means, provided he did no injury to himself, was just a part of Varek's daily policy; to profit by the misfortunes of others, was only a part of his trade. He was simply consistent in carrying his principles into every relation of life. Varek was at least no hypocrite.

As he walked his office floor in frowning meditation, the fact that he had lost his head—for so he put it to himself—troubled him far more than the knowledge that he was endeavoring to force a helpless girl into his arms; he considered that he was offering her an equivalent, though not exactly a fair one. That, however, was her lookout, not his. Varek paused at this point, and characterized his own feelings very briefly to himself, and yet he knew that he had left the whole truth unspoken. It made him uneasy, the strength of the thing that had risen up and taken him by the throat, for it had no precedent so far in his life. If by any chance he let that little, blue-eyed thing slip through his fingers, and some one else's arms caught her, some one who had the right to hold her that he had not, then how would it be with him?

VIII.

AN ERRONEOUS CONCLUSION

"UGH!" said Mr. Drake, "that snow's worse than rain." He was shaking his shabby coat vigorously, sending the little piles of melting snow with which it was covered into the utmost corners of his dirty little office. He had just opened up for Monday morning, and the weather promised a change to rain, and a consequent scarcity of customers. The day was mild and the huge flakes of snow melted almost before they reached the piles of frozen mud that were rapidly thawing.

Janet, as she climbed the dingy flight of stairs to Drake's office, looked with no more favor than he on the signs of the weather. She had some experience of a sudden thaw in that climate and had no wish for another.

Mr. Drake received her with a smile that added no attraction to his ferret face. His had been a checkered career, and he was a man of many vocations, none of them particularly open to inspection; but in spite of his acuteness Mr. Drake rarely found his pockets well lined. Therefore he was apt to observe any little points in his customers that might promise remunerative examination.

Now Janet had struck him as unusual, and this morning as she threw back her heavy veil, and he marked her pure beauty, etched in black and white, and the singular deep blue of her eyes, Mr. Drake's acumen received a fillip.

"Yes, I think I have a place for you," he said, in answer to her question; "but I have got to see the man myself. It's a sort of secretaryship and the pay is better than you are getting now"—Mr. Drake was good at improvisation.

Janet looked her relief and asked when she could hear something definite.

"Not till to-morrow," said Mr. Drake. "I wish you could get a recommendation from Mr. Varek, though," and he paid particular attention to Janet's flush. She lowered her veil and rose to go, for she had already told him that there would be none, and there was nothing more to be said.

"Never mind, we'll manage without it," he assured her; "but don't take anything until you have looked into this."

He waited until he heard Janet well on her way downstairs, and then turning to the telephone called up Varek's office.

"Hello, this Varek & Co.?" he asked. "Yes? Well, can I speak to Mr. Varek himself?"

"Hello, this is Varek, what is it?" came in Varek's incisive tones.

"Mr. Varek, this is Drake & Co., employment agency. I am sorry to trouble you but want to ask about a girl in your office for whom we have a place. Could you give her work any recommendation? Says her name is Janet Carew."

There was an appreciable pause, during which Mr. Drake smiled. Then the answer came shortly, "No, I have nothing to say of her work."

"Well it won't make any real difference. It's a place that means good pay and she will have a stage chance if it's in her. Sorry to have——"

"Wait a moment; who is this talking—Mr. Drake?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you could find a young man who could fill a vacant place in my office?"

"Yes, I guess so. What kind of work is it?"

"Well—I think it would be better for me to see you about it myself. I may be able to come this afternoon. You will be in?—All right," and Varek rang off.

Mr. Drake put up the receiver with rather an unsteady hand. He was a good deal taken aback at his own temerity, and the prospect of the approaching interview. He knew Leo Varek by sight, as the smaller fry are apt to know the big, and he stood in wholesome awe of him, but he had shot the mark and would abide by his guns. Nothing won, nothing lost, reflected Mr. Drake.

Meantime Janet was making her way as fast as possible through snow and slush to the office. She was late, but to her relief Varek was not there, nor did he come into her room all day. She had risen earlier than usual, and indulged in no car-ride and she was dreadfully tired. It seemed to her that the miserable, rainy day would never pass. In the middle of the afternoon she called up Burton & Clark and received so curt an answer that it left her surprised and hurt. They thought they could get nothing for her, and they rang off. She felt too wretched to wonder, and longed to be at home, but Amy had telephoned that she wanted to see her, and she must lose no chance.

Varek came into his office before she left, and in passing through he stopped her. "Will you wait a while?" he asked. "I want to have a talk with you."

It was exactly what Janet did not want and what she had been trying to avoid for a week, and her face showed it.

"Is it anything about my work?" she asked, and Varek flushed dully at her tone. He had had a particularly trying day, for he did not take kindly to being held up. He had made up his mind not to lose his temper, but her manner was like fire to tinder.

"It might pay you to listen," he sneered, getting up.

"I shall certainly be pleased to some other time," she replied in her soft drawl, "but this evening I have an engagement. Please excuse me," and she went out, not troubling to close the door behind her.

Varek stood up shaking and saw her go. Then he closed his door and got into his things. He was breathing hard. "By heaven, I'll make you listen!" he said through his set teeth.

He gained the street only a few moments after Janet, but when he turned in the direction she always took, she was not in sight. He stopped and looked behind him, and then stood quite still, so sudden was the impression that smote him. The girl was walking quickly in the opposite direction, and swinging along beside her, his hand under her elbow, guiding her among the pools on the sidewalk, was Ehrenstein.

Varek lifted his hat a little from his head as if the act might in some way clear the vision from his brain, but there was no mistaking Ehrenstein. A wave of fire swept him from head to foot, turning things red. If Ehrenstein had stood within reach, Varek's fingers would have been on his throat. With the blind instinct of fury he turned after them, and he had covered half the block before some sort of reason asserted itself. There were other and better ways than violence. He was still possessed of a sensation like nothing he had ever known before, but he could think.

He walked more slowly, for the two had reached the corner and stood talking earnestly. Suddenly they turned back and came toward him, and obeying the impulse of the moment, he stepped into a doorway and they passed close beside him. Janet's eyes were downcast and her whole look was disquieted, an expression from which Varek drew his own conclusions, as did he also from Ehrenstein's low-toned earnestness. He bent close to the girl as they moved along, the Jewish curve of his back more evident than usual. Varek stepped out and followed them.

So this was what it meant. She had tricked him all those weeks as she sat beside him, her long lashes dark against her cheek and her voice so low. He had scarcely known how to approach her, she seemed so apart from anything he had ever known—and what of it? She had taken his money and played the prude, while she drew that Jew into her net. She was clever enough to know that Ehrenstein could give her the one thing he could not, and as for money, Ehrenstein had enough for her needs. It seemed to Varek that he would swear aloud or choke. He splashed through pools and running water—for the gutters were floods—with utter unconsciousness.

They turned up to Broadway and Varek kept the other side of the street. If they took a car out North Broadway, they must cross to his corner. They stopped, seeking a crossing, and then picked their way

over, Ehrenstein officiously, after his usual manner, leading the way. Varek stepped into the corner drug store and standing close to the window never moved his eyes from them. He could see their faces well and now Janet was speaking. Ehrenstein was not tall, but the girl had to turn her face up to look into his, and in spite of the feelings that were tearing him, Varek noted the soft curve of her lifted chin. She was gazing into his face with an absorbed look she had never given *him,* and Ehrenstein gazed back, his hands and shoulders expressive of his interest.

The druggist whose window Varek had pre-empted, got into line with his absorbed visitor's face and had a shock. He didn't know much about deeds of violence, but he would hate to be responsible for that look, and he followed its direction for a cause.

A diversion now took place on the sidewalk. A pretty well-filled car drew up, and the crowd that had evidently been kept waiting because of some stoppage, made a rush for it. The gutter here ran full three feet wide and accidents happened. One man splashed plumb into the middle of the dirty flood, and a woman screamed as her rubber floated away. A slim young Jewish dude who was talking to a very pretty, plainly-dressed girl, gave one look at the water, then catching his partner round the waist, swung her clear of it and landed her on the car, an act that was loudly applauded from the sidewalk. The man beside the

druggist uttered a queer choking sound and dashed out of the door, but the car had started. If he had intended to run after it, he changed his mind, for he stood as if undecided until a second North Broadway car drew up,when glancing at the name the man sprang lightly over the three feet of water, and boarded it.

Varek made his way through and stood beside the motorman. The front car stopped again for passengers, and they crept slowly along. They passed the market still crawling, the first car well in sight.

"I suppose," said a thick voice at the motorman's shoulder, "that it would be possible to keep within a block of that car ahead there, for six blocks?"

The man turned his big red face and looked into Varek's eyes. A flicker of the eyelids then drew the man's look downward, and it rested on a bill the size of which caused a thrill to run down his fat back. He cast a cautious glance on either side, and another look into Varek's white face, and the conductor was given a start. They speeded up contrary to all rules, and dashed over Franklin Avenue, directly across the nose of a car that was about to turn in just ahead, and so on down the block, oblivious of a distracted woman and three children who stood waving on the corner.

The next crossing was reached and half the block traversed before the conductor gained the front platform. "What in hell's the matter?" he demanded. "Why you nearly dished us back there!"

"I lost hold a minute, it's all right now," said the motorman.

"Lost hold!" fumed the conductor. "Have you had too much?"

He drew up to take on passengers and the conductor kept an irate eye on him, but they were now well up near the other car, and skilful management kept the right distance for the next two blocks. Then the car in front of them let off a young man and woman, and when theirs reached the same corner Varek got off.

As he had expected, Ehrenstein went up the wide, broken, stone steps and entered with Janet, and Varek stood across the street ankle-deep in muddy water. It was not raining, but if it had been, it is doubtful if Varek would have known it. He waited a long time and it grew quite dark; then he crossed the street and waited a while longer at a safe distance. At last Ehrenstein came hurrying out, turning up his coat collar as he made off in the direction of the car. Then Varek followed after. The longing to spring upon him from behind was one of the hardest things Varek had ever had to conquer. He had waited, for he could not go knowing that Ehrenstein was still with Janet, but as he stood in the wet, he had said over and over again to himself, "I can hit him harder in another way."

He carried his fury of rage and jealousy back with him, and as he sat in his room, Janet's room, looking

into the blazing fire, the pictures that imagination drew of her in another's arms, another's hands in her hair, against her cheek—and that other such as Ehrenstein—drove him up and down, up and down, far into the night. Later when he was more calm he could think and plan, but not now. Some words that he had listened to in what seemed to him to have been another existence sounded in his ears—"but she is clever too—very clever. She hasn't starved so far and she won't——" So that man was right, and he, Varek, was all wrong—and under all his jealous rage there was a sickening sense of disappointment that grew more poignant as the hours passed. What was it he had dreamed he would take and hold for himself?—certainly not the vision that man's words had conjured up; there had always been too much of that material ready to his hand.

IX.

A PLEA AND A DEMAND

"I DON'T know what you mean," said Janet. "I think you are insane! You say I have lied to you, and deceived you, and used my place here to work out my own ends—all this about Mr. Ehrenstein—I don't know what you are talking about—you raging here before me. I have done nothing in your office or out of it, of which I am ashamed."

They stood facing each other at last, the girl white, shaking, her eyes aflame, and Varek, his face livid and convulsed, his hands clinched. His night of torment had passed somehow, and at the first sight of her the storm burst.

"You sat here for weeks," said Varek hoarsely, "and you wouldn't so much as let me touch you with a finger, and all the time you were intriguing with that Jew, with his loud ties and his flat-footed self-sufficiency. I thought you better than anything I had ever known; every day that passed I wanted you more just to take away out of this dirt and cherish—and all the time you were his to touch or kiss. Yes, I've gone mad all right, but whatever comes to you or him, you've got to tell me the truth to-day. Look me in the eye and answer me—I'll know it if you lie

to me," and he put his big hands on her shoulders and turned her face to the light.

As he had gone on her anger had turned to amazement, and then to disgusted understanding. The weary weight of trouble that had dragged itself along with her that morning returned to her, and that burden, and the pressure of his heavy hands, were more than she could bear.

"Let me sit down," she begged, with quivering lips. "I am so tired."

Varek drew a quick breath and pushed her into a chair, but as he sat before her he did not move his hand from her shoulder, and his eyes held hers. There was a hopeless weariness in their depths, but he found nothing else.

"I think I know now what you mean," said the girl, dully, "though even if it were true, some of it, which it is not, I cannot see your right to take me to task. When have I given you any such right? I will explain because it is only what I was going to tell you when I came in. Mr. Ehrenstein is no more to me—than you are. No, he is less, for there have been times when you were kind, and I liked you. I scarcely know him. In all the time I have been here I haven't spoken half a dozen words to him until yesterday. It was true what I told you—that I had an engagement. I was going to see a girl who is helping me to get a place, and that is another thing

I was going to tell you to-day—that I could not stay here any longer.

"When I went out Mr. Ehrenstein must have followed me, for he came up behind me and asked if he could tell me something that I ought to know. It was about my brother Paul, and it was dreadful. Mr. Ehrenstein said that he knew the man that Paul has seen so much of lately; he is in this man's room every night, and I had never suspected. They gamble all night sometimes. I don't know where Paul got the money at first, but only a night or two ago he was there, and there were several playing, and Paul lost to them, and this man, Doane, taunted him. Then Paul left and came back with money, and Mr. Ehrenstein saw the envelope, and it had your firm's name on it. He said he thought it was queer, but it did strike him at first that it might be my salary—only there was more than that. It was over a hundred dollars—and Paul lost it all—every cent. He said he spoke to Paul and to Doane too, but Paul was furious; then he made up his mind to tell me. He is vulgar, I know, and forward, but he spoke kindly to me and I think he meant kindly, and I shall always remember it," she paused, drawing her breath in a heavy sigh, and Varek took his hand from her shoulder.

"I did not know what to do," she said; "for gambling is a dreadful thing in our family. It has

ruined so many of us, and with Paul it would just be insanity—and if mother should find out——" she shuddered violently. "Then I thought if Mr. Ehrenstein would speak to that man and ask him to let Paul alone, perhaps he would. He says this Doane is really a brilliant man and well educated, and could do almost anything, but he will do nothing but gamble, and just now he is down in his luck. It was he that Mr. Ehrenstein went into our house to see last night, and not me, and it was kindness to me that made him go. It is because you think the worst of others that you suffer yourself; wretched as I am, I think I am sorry for you." She looked with a little twisted smile into Varek's face, from which the swollen lines were slowly disappearing. He got up with a groan and leaning his arm on the mantel laid his head on it.

There was silence for a time, and then Janet went on. "I have engaged to go to another place—to-morrow—and I must arrange about that money that Paul—that I lost. I don't understand about there being so much; I didn't unfold the bills when I put them away. I wanted to return them to you just as you gave them to me. Did you put in more than my salary?"

"Yes, I did," said Varek, in a smothered voice. He lifted his head with an impatient gesture, looking down at her. "Don't think of it," he said.

"I was afraid so," said the girl in a low voice,

"and you have thought all this week that I knew it and was taking advantage." She paused and took something from her purse, and her voice was clearer. "Mr. Varek, will you look at this, please; it is something we have had a long time," and she held it up to him in the palm of her hand. It was a miniature, an exquisite little thing, a girl's face with hair dressed high in the fashion of a century before, and the great, wide eyes looked up at him from Janet's own face.

"It's like you, Peggy," he said.

"It was my great-grandmother Carew, and I know it is well painted. Mr. Varek, I don't know if it is worth as much as that money—but you collect such things—would you please take this in place of it?"

Varek stared into her earnest face for a moment, going red, then white, then with a half laugh, half sob, he flung himself down and gathered her in his arms. "Oh, money, money!" he said, "what does it matter! —Peggy, I have you again—just my little girl—my honest, sweet little girl—and I have not been mistaken in her all these weeks. That creature that tormented me last night is gone forever. Peggy, will you forgive me, dear—will you have patience with me?" He held her close, his lips on her cheek.

She had struggled in his hold at first, but he had touched something in her beside fear, and if it was to be now, might she have courage to meet it. She was quiet, waiting for him to gain calmness. Of her

mother, of Paul, of their necessities, she *would not* think. The fallen miniature smiled up at her from the floor, an emblem of her integrity, and she fastened her eyes upon it.

Varek loosened his hold at last and knelt beside her, still panting; he took her hand in his and held it against his hot cheek. With all his strength he was trying to keep control of himself; Janet moved softly to rise.

"Oh, no, Peggy, listen to me!" he said, passionately. "Don't be afraid to stay with me a little while! You must hear me now; there is nothing will hinder me from speaking. In all this time I think I have been trying with ugly words and thoughts to cover up what has been growing in me, but it's too much for me. Last night I faced it squarely. If I can't have you I don't want anything. I have *got* to have you; it has come to that pass with me. . . . Peggy, I want to tell you a little about myself, I mean how I grew up, and what sort of a life I've had of it; you may forgive me a few things then. I have followed you home often, not just to pry, but because you looked so white and sick, and I was afraid. I've seen the dirty houses, and the wretched women and children, and it was my childhood brought back. I was as poor as any of those to begin with. I sold papers, I blacked boots, I went hungry. I was office-boy, errand-boy, anything and everything that would

keep me about Wall Street, for I had come into the world I think with an ambition. As I grew older I was only the more convinced that there was just one thing worth trying for and that was money; that it brought power and happiness—for I had wanted material things so long that the possession of them seemed sweet; but more than anything I liked getting money because I could fight for it. I could pit my brain and nerve against others, and come out ahead. It's like strong wine when you get a taste of it, but it's a heavy enamelling process. I soon found I was more clever at the game than most, but I started handicapped and there was one man who nearly did for me. He and I have a little account to settle yet. . . . It sounds short in the telling, this, but, Peggy, it's meant years of the life that's made me what I am. I never had affection given me by any one, I never thought about it. The women I have known—well, you wouldn't understand, and I am glad you can't—it wasn't affection they gave me, nor I them. Money doesn't buy love, but it wouldn't have mattered much if it did, I didn't want it particularly. I never wanted it until I knew you, and then I didn't know what it was I wanted, and I sought you as I have everything else I've wished for." Varek stopped and moistened his dry lips, but Janet did not stir. He was talking himself back to some sort of outward calmness, but his next words held a deeper note.

"Peggy, in all these years I've had no home. It was another of the things I didn't think about until it was too late, for when I had my chance I bartered it away. I had plenty of money and I began to see my opportunities here. I wanted to take my place among other men of social position; there were certain clubs I wanted to join; I wanted a chance to meet men on an equal social footing as well as a financial one. It was not for any love of society in the ordinary sense,—that bores me beyond anything,—but just that I had a right to it if I could get it, and that in the things that were going to be doing in this place, I wanted to take my part, and with social backing.

"There was a man who could do a lot for me in that direction, and he was hampered by a slender purse and an ambitious, extravagant wife and daughter. It was a bargain like any other; I married the daughter and gave them the luxuries, and I had my clubs and position." Varek was silent a moment holding Janet's hand more tightly. "I want you to understand, Peggy, about my wife and me," he said. "The result of such a marriage was natural. I cared nothing for her, had never cared; she wasn't disagreeable to me, that was all. As for her, I knew that what affection she was capable of—and it isn't much—was engaged elsewhere; that is what sentiment is left over after the satisfied contemplation of her carriage and pair, and a few like accessories." Varek's lip

curled. "Less than a year after our marriage we reached an agreement, and I made it a lasting one, for I am apt to know where I stand. To outsiders we are Mr. and Mrs. Leo Varek, and I assume my pretentious house, and the absolutely necessary public appearances with Mrs. Varek and the in-laws, just as I put on my dress coat, only not nearly so often. Money is a great smoother of difficulties, and an absorbed business man spends little time in the bosom of his family, unless he particularly desires it." Janet moved restlessly and Varek dropped his cutting tone.

"Forgive me, dear," he said; "I put that brutally. I didn't mean to; it's a state of things so usual that comment's out of place. I have told you enough and I haven't smoothed things. Peggy, I *hate* the life I've been living; I have a sickness at the thought of it—all except my work. It's been growing on me until it is intolerable, and I didn't know what made my disgust until lately. When I would come in here, and there was just you and I and the fire and the rain on the window-pane outside—then I knew. Little one, I want a home—I want some one in it to love with every bit of strength there is in me—I want what's sweet, and true, and beautiful, to hold here close in my arms. I want all the things I never have had before—Peggy, I want you!" The girl could not move in his arms, but her hands sought each other and gripped hard, and her eyes never left the floor.

"Peggy, you won't speak to me," he went on, breathing short. "Listen—I will put Paul where he can have good influences and scientific care; I am not so sure he cannot be cured. He shall have every care, every comfort—and your mother——" The hands in Janet's lap turned blue. "Peggy, she's slowly dying where she is. You shall give her light, and air, and sunshine—whatever your love suggests for her—and I promise you these things for them for the rest of their lives. . . . Your mother will know nothing. There will be some of your father's money forthcoming; I shall see her; it will not rest with you—the explanation; you will live with friends—all that is easy. Peggy, tell me you will come!—You don't need to speak—just look at me, I shall know—Peggy, won't you answer me?"

"I cannot do it," said Janet, slowly but clearly.

He turned her face up and kissed her lips. "You think you don't love me, and you're afraid, is that it? You don't know anything about love, little one; perhaps we can learn together. It's the opinion of people you shrink from, then? There are only one or two that know you, and you'll step out of their lives; I shall take care you are shielded."

"No," Janet reiterated, "I cannot do it. You might as well let me go. I *cannot.*"

"Why?" said Varek.

"It would be living hatefully—a lie to my mother

all day long. It would be the feeling in me that I was—I cannot explain it to you! What you ask is not *right*. It is not what other people think; it is what I feel here, in myself."

The dull red deepened in Varek's face, and his look hardened. "Did you never conceal anything from your mother when it was for her own good?" he asked. He had risen and so had Janet.

"Never anything like this."

"It's merely a case of degree, then," said Varek, "and your feelings are simply the result of education. If you were a Turk, or a Jap, you would feel quite differently. It's a few conventions you are balking at."

"I cannot argue with you," said the girl; "I am going."

Varek studied her set face in silence for a time, and the color faded slowly from his own. "Peggy, have you any idea what this means to me——"

"I cannot help that," she said. "It does not make it right, and I must go."

He put his arms about her then and drew her to him, holding her close against his breast; she felt the hard quick beating of his heart and the pressure of his lips on her cheek. "Not for a few minutes, dear," he whispered. "Stop and think what you are doing and what you are going back to. Peggy, let me take all that burden and carry it for you—I beg

you to let me. You have seen the hard and ugly side of me—let me show you how different I can be. . . . Don't be afraid, sweetheart. Why, I love you—don't you understand? I love you, little one! Is it so bad to be loved as I will always love you?" But she only stiffened in his embrace, her lips like ice under his, and he lifted his head at last and looked down at her in a sort of dull surprise. She neither struggled nor spoke, but her frozen silence was her answer, and slowly his brows lowered into their black look. "It's yourself you love, after all," he said at last. "Your feelings, or whatever you call them—not your mother, or Paul; by a word you could give them life—for it's as bad as that with them, and you know it." He spoke scornfully, cuttingly.

Janet stood with bent head, her face working. "My mother would rather die than have me do such a thing," she gasped. "She loves me——"

"That's it," said Varek. "She loves you better than herself—she's superior to you in that."

"Oh!" cried the girl, wildly, "stand out of my way!—You say you love me, and you can torture me like this!—Let me go!" She had torn herself loose from his hold, and groped her way to the door like one blinded. "Let me go, let me go," she repeated.

"Very well, go if you must," said Varek, dead white, and through stiff lips; "but, Peggy, remember what I tell you—I would have saved you what you will

go through before you give in—I have tried to-day—*but this is my deal;* I'll stand for it, and you will come to my terms; you haven't a single winning chance, and there is no power on earth can make me give you up." He brought her coat and drew it on for her, then lifting her up he kissed her eyes and her lips, and opened the door.

X.

"YOU SHALL GIVE HER LIGHT—AND AIR—AND SUNSHINE"

A TERRIFIC gust of wind swept round the old house, rattling the windows and whistling through crevices. One of the big front doors banged with a noise like thunder, and Janet raised her head from her pillow listening intently to discover if her mother was awake. That noise must have waked her, Janet thought, but Mrs. Carew did not stir, and she dropped back again. She did not know what time it was, for it was very late when she lay down. The cold had driven her under the covers, but the watch she was keeping over her mother, and her own thoughts, banished sleep.

The city was in the grip of a blizzard, and the giant shook her and tossed her at will. The sharp needle-like particles of snow drove frantically against the window-panes and found their way into every smallest crack. Missouri was indulging in a saturnalia of ice, and wind, and snow; and poor mortals sought to hide and warm themselves as best they might. Even before it was dark Janet had seen the big snow-drifts, and an unaccustomed silence had announced that the cars had stopped.

She had not gone down-town that day, for she

could not leave her mother, and besides she could not have worked in that frigid warehouse on a biting day like this. Her predecessor had left because of the cold. The little dark partition where she had her desk was supposed to be heated by a stove, but even on an average day the girl was numb with cold from morning until night, and the night through until morning; it was a dull continuous ache of cold, and she bore it as she bore everything during those days, dumbly, mechanically, hopelessly. There was only one end for them.

The agencies had declined to do anything for her, and she had not understood; but wondering would not help her, there was enough else to think of. She had hoped that Paul of a necessity would give up his long evenings spent in Doane's room, now that there was no possibility of money from her, but on the contrary he was more absorbed than ever, scarcely speaking even to his mother, and a bright spot of color had begun to burn in his cheeks. He certainly had money from some source. That morning Mrs. Carew had fainted, and though she did not seem to be ill in the way she had been before, Janet was terribly frightened; her mother had been so quiet all day. Mrs. Carew knew nothing of the change to her present miserable quarters, and how long could she keep it from her? The coal in the stove was from Lizzie's meagre store, and the bread for their supper came from the

same source. If she could live through the cold in that warehouse on the levee, it would be days before she could have her pay.

Janet did not say as she lay there, "The end had come;" but all day there had been a voice in her ear, thick in its insistent passion—"It's yourself you love," it said, and again—"By one word you could give them life——" A great armful of his flowers stood on the table, mocking their poverty; the icy draught between the window and the door would freeze them solid before morning, but now the room was heavy with their perfume.

There was a suppressed sound from her mother's bed, that all the roar outside could not cover. Janet crept from her couch and bent over her. The half-strangled sob came again. "Mother, dear," said Janet, "you are crying. What is it?" She crept in beside the convulsed little figure and wrapped her arms about it. "Tell me, Mummie, tell me," she begged.

It was a long time before Mrs. Carew could speak, then she whispered, "Paul——" So her mother knew. Janet went down into a sea of misery and the waves closed over her.

"I would not complain," said Mrs. Carew—"our poverty, everything, I could bear—but such a thing to come to my boy, my poor crippled boy, to ruin his soul! Janet, I cannot endure it."

There was no answer, and Mrs. Carew's broken voice went on. "All day I have lain here thinking. I have turned in every direction for help. Janet do you know of anything we can do?" Her daughter only drew her closer.

"I have thought of every one we have ever known, and I cannot see a way. If Mr. Bronson were here I think I could force something from him; I have always felt that he was not open with us. Even your employer, Mr. Varek—I thought I might appeal to him. He seems kind; he might do something for Paul. The blind are pitiful, Jannie, and for my son I could bring myself to beg. If I asked him to come and see me, do you think he would come?" Janet was silent.

"You won't say anything, Jannie; you think he would refuse me——" Mrs. Carew half sat up, gasping.

"He will come, mother," said the girl, through stiff lips. "And he will help you. You must lie down now, dear, and let me keep you warm. You see I know him better than you do, and I *know* he will come. He is very clever too, and a man—and we—we're such—helpless women." She drew her mother down against her breast, softly kissing her.

"You seem so certain, Jannie."

"I am, dear. It will be a way out for all of us. I am going to rub your forehead now, just gently, over

your eyes, and you must go to sleep. You can't afford to be ill to-morrow."

"No, I know I must not, I will try to sleep,—but, Jannie, how shall we do—will you ask him to-morrow to come? I don't like to have you do that."

"I—I don't know," said Janet very low; "I want to stay with you as long as I—can. I mean you are not well enough. I think he will understand if—if I write—for you."

"It would be the best way," said Mrs. Carew, considering. "Jannie, if you really think he will do something for Paul—you don't know how I should feel!"

"Yes—I—do. Mother, you will—always—love—me too?"

"Jannie! How can you ask! There is nothing could stop my loving you—you and Paul. Don't you know that the more unfortunate a child is the more a mother loves it? That is why it will kill me—about Paul—if there is no help for him."

"Yes, mother, but there will be. And now you *must* go to sleep. Do you remember how Mammy used to rub your head—like this?"

They were silent a long time, and gradually her mother's form relaxed and she breathed softly. The girl's wrist ached, but she went on until she was sure her mother slept. There was creeping over her a strange feeling of arrested sensation, such as comes

to one who has wept wildly for hours—as if she lay an atom in a vast space. The glimmer of the window was miles away, and the head on her arm as light as down. There was a stillness upon her so absolute that it was endless—and there faded away with her into the great silence the whisper—"You shall give her—light—and air—and sunshine——"

BOOK II.

I.

THE TROUBLE-MAKING PRESS

"BRAUN!" shouted Ehrenstein. "Oh, my eye, Braun, look here! If that ain't a scunner for the old man!" The heads of the two came together over the *Morning Press,* and Ehrenstein's finger pointed excitedly down the column. It was a simply-written statement of some facts stumbled upon by an enterprising reporter, which facts he had given to his paper with the certainty of the public's interest therein. In a place the size of this their flourishing city, it was not out of reason to suppose that some interest might be felt as to the ownership of certain properties that frequently figured in unsavory mention. Did the public in general ever stop to inquire who owned certain houses, places of resort, even whole blocks, that clean-living citizens avoided? The *Press* was prepared to give them full information. The *Press* also was assured of the surprise, as well as the regret—to put it mildly—that the respectable element would feel at the prominence of certain names in the following list. The names in brackets, appended to fictitious names or the names of agents, were the names of the actual owners of said properties; said owners deriving a rate of interest from these same properties, that

might explain to some extent the reason for ownership. But the *Press* did not desire to make comments —it was simply dealing with facts. The list followed.

"See there, and there, and there," said Ehrenstein. "That last is a whole row of 'em—you know, Braun, with wine-rooms below. Why in ten years that property will run into a cool million or so, the way it lies; he wouldn't let it go, of course, and in the mean time the interest! Say, Braun, this lot's under the name of Scott, and that other Jones, and down here is Cahn—bet they don't exist. It's every bit of it old Bronson's. Varek'll grin when he sees it; he don't love the old man. What a joke!"

Braun did not see the "joke" side of it. He looked preternaturally solemn. "It'll be a very bad thing for him socially, very bad," he announced.

Ehrenstein's face grew mischievous, for he knew Braun's weakness, as who did not who knew Braun? But if he had thought of prodding the other young man, he changed his mind and turned his attention to Mr. Calvin Bronson.

"A church member," said Ehrenstein in glee, "a deacon, for all I know, and his name on every charity—I say it's a good joke on him, Braun;" but Braun looked upon it as a catastrophe.

If Ehrenstein's idol was the dollar, Braun's was society. To form a part of that throng that frivoled and glittered in what is known as "the best society;"

to carry himself with the ease of the youth born to his place; to dance attendance on the belle of the season, even to flirt outrageously with the safely married,—these had been dream longings to Braun for many a day. There was the making in him of the most thoroughgoing snob, but fate had denied him his chance. His parents were common, his beginnings mean, and though he worked doggedly, with a capacity for figures and office management really remarkable, his soul languished within him.

Varek had noted Braun's aspirations with a good deal of contemptuous amusement, and he finally took pity on him. The young fellow served him faithfully, and if his crumb was a loaf to the dog, why, let him have it. He introduced him to his home, and turned him over to Mrs. Varek. Then a bit of heaven opened to Braun. He was bidden to occasional tea-drinkings, now and then to a dinner to fill some delinquent's place, and finally to dances. Others beside Mrs. Varek then discovered the convenience of a young man who was always ready to be an accommodation; besides, Braun's income was good enough to make him an eligible. Braun was entering upon his own.

At first his hands and feet, his inability to take part in the elusive, though none too intelligent, conversation about him, and his consciousness of inferiority to the general smartness, caused him agonies. But

ambition backed by perseverance will conquer, and Braun was beginning to conquer. He could now send flowers to Mrs. Varek with almost a blasé air. His blond, regular-featured face began to assume the indifferent expression demanded of the young eligible. Braun was happy.

That any one should so offend respectability and draw upon himself the frown of society, was a serious thing to Braun. Would the Misses Bronson suffer in consequence? He would seek enlightenment of his chief.

Varek had come in with the signs of merriment upon him. He had picked up and brought downtown with him in his car an eminently respectable citizen, and as Varek leaned back at his ease, he had been greatly entertained by the remarks of Mr. Jules-Clarke. He was not one of Varek's group of financiers; he belonged rather to the coterie of reformers who had looked with much favor upon Mr. Bronson, a favor Mr. Bronson had gone out of his way to cultivate. These gentlemen had dipped joyfully into Bronson's purse for their many charities, and he had not given with a niggardly hand. Mrs. Bronson's ample front was often seen in conjunction with the still more ample proportions of Mrs. Jules-Clarke, when the committees on "Combined Charities" met. Mrs. Jules-Clarke was a veteran in the art of raising subscriptions, as many besides Varek knew.

"It's very awkward," Mr. Jules-Clarke complained, ruefully. "My wife is terribly upset. She spent most of the night talking about it. You see she is vice-president of the Elton Society, the chief object of which is the rescue of women and girls, and Mr. Bronson's donation, much the largest given, is just in."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Varek, losing control of his risibilities at last, and throwing back his head he indulged in a shout of laughter that startled his chauffeur and turned the heads of the passers-by. The picture of Mrs. Jules-Clarke attired for the night and swelling with indignant perturbation on the one hand, and on the other, the smiling Bronson, receiving and dispensing with equal serenity, had been too much for him.

When he had regained his gravity, he felt apologetic, for to Mr. Jules-Clarke it seemed no laughing matter. "Nor would it be to me, if I had listened most of the night in conjugal seclusion to Mrs. Jules-Clarke," thought Varek. So he put forth his powers to please, and dropped his guest on Broadway in a much happier frame of mind than when he had picked him up.

Braun questioned Varek on the first opportunity. "What are people going to say about it?" he asked.

"Well," said Varek, "I guess they will *say* a lot for a day or two."

"But what will they do—won't they make him feel it, won't it make a difference?" insisted Braun.

"Look here, Braun," said Varek, with a glance half sharp, half amused, "society is an animal with a mighty tough hide. You go ahead and take Miss Bronson to that dance; it's a week off and almost anything can be forgotten in a week."

If society forgot, or pretended to forget in a week, there were a few that did not, and among these was Mr. Calvin Bronson. He had his own methods of ferreting out hidden things, and his discoveries filled him with rage. He found whose instigation and money had carried through the little investigation that had so sorely mortified him. He had passed some bad hours in the privacy of his home, and every reserved greeting he met with in public made him smart afresh. With all his soul he longed to strike back, but he was afraid, dreadfully afraid.

The hatred that Bronson felt for the man who had secretly stabbed him was not of any recent growth. It dated back to their New York days when Varek had formed a part of Bronson's equipment. The young fellow was unusually clever, and had learned a little too much of Bronson's bucket-shop methods, for Bronson & Co. of New York was an entirely different proposition from Bronson & Co. of St. Louis; just as the Bronson that Varek first knew

was several degrees in advance of the attorney-at-law that Bronson hoped no one remembered.

Varek had become a menace to his chief, and Bronson had taken his own means of getting rid of him. Varek was learning fast, but he was not as yet a match for the older man, and Bronson had swamped every cent of the young fellow's hard-earned savings. While he was accomplishing this in New York, Varek was sent on a wild-goose chase among California mining camps and there Bronson lost him by the simple method of stopping remittances.

There had followed for Varek the five hardest years of his life. He had been lumberman, cowboy, miner; he had wandered all over the great West and up into Alaska; he had never lost his love for the ticker, but he had no mind to go back to it with empty pockets. He had not tried to return to New York, for what could he, penniless, do against Bronson? He wanted to make his strike first, and he did finally, when he had almost given up expecting it. He had learned mines and mining thoroughly, but it was a different life that drew him. The boy who had grown up on the streets had never ceased to long for them.

He had started east and come as far as St. Louis. There he stopped for a time, for the place interested him. It had its possibilities, but during those five years there had always been in the back of his mind a

desire to sit down opposite Bronson and flourish—to succeed, and smile indifferently at the older man, and to beat him at his game if he could. He was still mooting the question when he stumbled upon Bronson & Co. It only needed a superficial glance to assure him that his old chief was successful and that Bronson & Co. was highly respectable. Varek made his decision on the spot.

The reappearance of the youth he had so easily lost, in the bronzed, powerful-looking man who had money to back him, and brains and nerve to use it to the best advantage, was one of the greatest surprises of Bronson's eventful life. He had the sense to attempt no explanations; but after taking stock of the young man he had offered his assistance as one knowing the ground. Varek had thanked him and gone on his way, and the manner of it had made Bronson uneasy. Still, if Varek had ever tattled, Bronson in his most careful efforts had failed to discover it. Varek neither sought nor avoided him, and Bronson's hatred as it grew began to be touched by fear. There is a nature that always hates those it has wronged and also those to whom it is indebted, and Bronson's was one of these. That they should be drawn into some enterprises together was unavoidable, and he had purposely let Varek in on a well-paying thing or two, but the younger man had accepted or declined with equal indifference. Bronson never took his watchful eye

from him, but Varek was neither to be bribed nor caught napping.

The younger man was steadily successful. He had made one of the best marriages in the city from a social standpoint, and he had come forward among financial leaders. It looked as if he were going to be not just a successful man, but an influential one as well. A conservative but very wealthy city was waking up to a realization of its immense possibilities. New elements and new men were coming to the front. For men with a genius for finance like Varek, the days were not long enough in which to gather in the harvest and sow for the future. Brains of Varek's type rarely go begging, and he was taking no second rate place in the councils of the inner circle. He had meant to be "in the things that were doing," and he was, and it had no small share in the older man's consuming rage.

Bronson studied his enemy carefully from all sides, but seek as he might, he could find no really vulnerable point in his armor. In business he had as clean a record as most. If he had pushed weaker men to the wall, and taken advantage of every opportunity, there were others doing the same; it had merely gained him the name of a hard man. He knew Varek's reputation in certain directions and thought him more of a sensualist than he was, but he could lay his hand on nothing practical for his purpose.

There were things he had learned since his return in the early spring, that he might use he thought, to stir up domestic difficulties, but warned by a certain recollection he preferred not to touch it. "You would better make terms with him even at a loss to yourself," advised caution. "You cannot afford any more exposés"—and caution prevailed.

II.

AN ULTIMATUM

HAVING once made up his mind Bronson lost no time. Ehrenstein brought to Varek the request for an interview, and was somewhat mystified by Varek's, "Already! very well, don't let us be interrupted."

Bronson came in with all of his usual florid complacency, and his greeting was cordial. "It's delightful—this cool room after the street," he said, appreciatively, taking the chair Varek offered him. "The first of April only, and it's like June out there."

"We're jumping into summer as we jumped into winter," returned Varek, offering his caller a cigar. "You were lucky enough to escape that part of it." Varek's manner was as usual, and as usual he did not shake hands with his visitor. Bronson could not remember his having done so in years.

They talked the money market for a time. "Consolidated Electric's going up," remarked Bronson. "I wish you were on the board with us, Varek. That and Whery are the two best things going."

"Yes," said Varek, "I suppose they are."

Bronson smoked in silence for a time, and then he drew himself up with an air of decision. "I have come here to ask you a question, Varek," said he, "and

you are too busy a man, and so am I, to waste time. Will you tell me why you set the papers on me?" Bronson's whole bearing was one of dignified though grieved questioning.

"Doubtless you made a guess or two as to my reasons," Varek returned, quietly.

"I thought possibly it was a grudge you bore me for my unfortunate investment of your money years ago; I could think of no other reason, there could be no other," said Bronson, candidly. "I have always regretted that whole business, and though I made mistakes, I think you misjudged me. After I wrote you about your loss I never had a word from you, and no answer to my following letter in which I sent you money. I should have liked to clear this thing up long ago, but your manner repulsed me." Mr. Bronson paused, but Varek's face was expressionless as he studied the tip of his cigar, and the older man went on, his voice swelling in fuller cadence. "If you think I wronged you, you have had your revenge. Can't we drop all that? There are ways in which I can be useful to you; I have every wish to be on friendly terms."

"That's not possible," said Varek.

"Why?" asked Bronson. "I can see no reason."

Varek had been leaning back, his face turned slightly away, but now he sat upright and putting down his cigar he looked squarely at the older man.

"We will let that subject rest," said he, "and I'll answer your first question. I helped the *Press* to a few facts because I wanted you to come to me in just the frame of mind in which you have come. You haven't forgotten little Cravette's gibe at you about your real estate and mint-juleps? It was your face gave you away and set me to thinking. I wanted to get some information from you that day and I got more than I looked for, that was all. You are mistaken in your supposition that I have borne you a grudge for your way of getting rid of me, but it has had a good deal to do with my estimate of you, which justifies me in saying that you lied a few minutes ago when you prattled about having written and sent me money. You did nothing of the kind—but there is no need for you to get excited," for Bronson had half risen. "We will say that you had a lapse of memory —it was so long ago. Well, as I was saying, you are wrong about the grudge. I have thanked you almost every day for that hard five years you gave me. It made me. I was in a fair way to become just a clever trickster, and the experience, and the wider view they gave me, were my salvation. We will drop that too; it's something else I want to talk about. Will you have a cigar?—No! Well, it's about the affairs of a man who died a little over a year ago. You remember Mr. Denis Carew?" The look of complete surprise on Bronson's red face gave way in turn

to a wavering glance, and the characteristic smile appeared on Varek's lips.

"I have had reason to look into some transactions prior to Mr. Carew's death," continued Varek, "and I have found that you are pretty well mixed up in them. Mr. Carew seems to have had a faculty for getting himself into financial difficulties. During the last two years of his life you appear to have been his constant adviser, even finding it worth your while to spend a good deal of your time away from here and in his society. His means seem to have been considerable to begin with, and he was a shareholder in several companies. In an incredibly short time these shares were yours. You took his home next and everything else he had, except a piece of land in Arizona. Mr. Carew was pretty far gone by that time, for he was drinking and gambling hard, and there were intervals when he was not sane, but he clung to that land. He had received an impression of its value that persisted in his mind in spite of his irresponsible condition."

Bronson had moved impatiently at this point. His face had paled and set, and he spoke with somewhat of Varek's own incisiveness. The smooth complacency was wiped out of face and manner. "What rot are you giving me?" he said. "Why, Carew was drink-crazy and I kept him going, he and his family, for goodness knows how long. I loaned him money,

and the way he was going I saw I had to have security, that was all. I don't doubt he talked wildly about it—the crazy fool! If you think you are going to come it over me because you have raked up some of Carew's talk, you are much mistaken."

He fairly snarled at the last, but Varek laughed in his face. "All right," he said. "I thought you wanted my reason for setting the papers on you, and I was giving it to you, that's all. You can go if you don't want to hear it—it's immaterial to me—only—" and his voice dropped to a lower note while his lip lifted over his teeth—"I should advise you to sit where you are."

The two eyed each other in silence, then Bronson said, contemptuously, "Oh, go ahead, of course! If a man's after blackmail it's as well to know what he's going on."

"Thanks," said Varek, evenly. "You show your good sense in desiring to know where you stand, and I shall try not to waste words. I was talking about Carew's piece of land, wasn't I? Well, he was right about its value, only he didn't begin to know how good a thing it was. I knew what it was worth,—it was one of the things I learned in those years you were responsible for,—and one of the first things I did after I was established enough to spare the money was to try to get it. Carew already had it, and I said to myself, 'There's a lucky dog.' I wasn't up to pay-

ing high for it so I let it go. Just about a year ago I looked the thing up again, and found that you had it. I should probably never have thought of the name Carew again, if you had not recalled it yourself last autumn, and given me all those melancholy details that afternoon at the club. I wasn't long putting two and two together—but to go on with Carew; he had about reached the end. He hadn't a friend but yourself and an old man who lived in the same house, and was about as down in the heel as himself. He had dropped out of respectable things, and he was crazy with anxiety over his family. Then you applied the thumbscrews. You held up to him the helpless state of his family; you had more than one interview, but there came the night when you got your way. The conversation between you and Carew makes interesting telling. His arraignment of you was vivid and convincing—but you got your way. You got Carew's piece of land, and for it you bound yourself to do certain things. Carew made you put them down in the form of an agreement, and in plainly legal terms, for his mind was clear for the time, and he would sign nothing until that paper was signed and witnessed. It was witnessed by the old man and the woman in whose house they lived—you remember the terms of that agreement, Mr. Bronson?" The usually florid face of the man before him wore a mottled look, and he did not take his eyes from the rug at his feet, but

he articulated clearly enough: "I remember no such circumstances. Please proceed." He had gone back to his usual manner and Varek looked him over coldly.

"Just another lapse of your memory," he said. "I shall have to jog it a little, and state the terms myself. You agreed to pay Mrs. Carew, or in case of her death, her heirs, a certain amount monthly until you had paid in full a sum named in the agreement, the monthly payments to begin one month from the day the agreement was signed, and that the failure to meet in any particular the terms of said agreement invalidated the whole transaction. I am not giving legal detail, you know that paper even better than I. There were two copies, you had one, Carew the other.

"You kept Carew conscious long enough to get your deed, and then he collapsed utterly. You hastened to take charge of his effects, but to your surprise you did not find the paper. Your search was a thorough one, you even searched Carew, but all you found was a fragment among the burnt papers in the grate. You had given Carew only a short time alone, but it was clear that he had used it to destroy papers and that particular paper among them. He was capable of it in his muddled state. You were pretty easy in your mind, and you promptly shipped Carew home—you were done with him. You were certain of that fragment, it was in your own hand, and you had no reason to fear those two witnesses. They were two

poor creatures who would soon be swallowed up in the slums. Then having concluded that if Mrs. Carew knew anything of her husband's affairs you would like early notice of it, you wrote her your condolences. The letter you received from her daughter convinced you of their ignorance of any claim, aside from friendship, that they might have on you. Their sudden appearance here must have given you a slight shock, but you bore it well as soon as you knew its cause, and the position you proceeded to occupy toward them suited you exactly. You have patted yourself on the back these many months, but now you'll pay the reckoning."

The two ugly passion-marked faces stared steadily at each other. The man who had waited quietly for years for his revenge showed in Varek's lifted lip and steely eye, and the rage that shook the whole of Bronson's fat body was only equaled by the concentrated malignity of his look. He seemed to flatten and distend like a reptile, and no volition of his could hold back the words that rose up into his mouth.

"It's a——conspiracy to rob me, you low-lived beast—a conspiracy hatched by you and that girl, that——of yours."

Varek was on him at a leap. His iron grip settled on the older man's throat, and he lifted him and shook him like a rag. Bronson struggled and struck out with all his strength, but he was a child in the other's

hold. The blood filled his bulging eyes, and his swelling tongue lolled out, and still Varek gripped him, and it was only when he dragged limp that the other loosened his hold and flung him into his chair. A long time Varek stood over him, breathing hard, his hands in his pockets, his legs apart. He watched the purple congested face regain a more normal color, and the gasping breath become more regular. Then he went into the next room and brought out some whiskey and water. He seated himself at his desk and turned his back, giving the man time to recover himself, and when he spoke again it was very quietly.

"I nearly did for you," he said, "and I will again unless you guard your tongue. I haven't much more to say, but you will hear me out. Last fall you sent me, you turned over to my tender mercies, a child, for that's what she was in experience, and you sent her labelled with an insinuation. Did you think I was so poor a judge of character? Did you suppose I could look at your note and then at her face and doubt? I coupled her name with my recollection and I began to understand, but to make sure I let you talk. You made good the remark in your note, and went on to clear my path for me. It must have been a sudden fit of anger that blinded you into thinking that you could use me for a tool and not get cut yourself, and, Lord, but you must have hated that child!

"I thought a little and I concluded that this was

just another you wanted to lose as you had tried to lose me. You wanted her ruined, discredited. The mother and the boy you didn't fear, but the girl might be troublesome. Well as I knew you, I couldn't believe it at first; it was so diabolical, so like a woman's way. I am not a stickler, but I confess that would be beyond me. You haven't a good opinion of me, and doubtless I deserve it, but it's not always safe to judge another man by yourself, or circumstances by appearances;—and now I am going to tell you something, and you keep it by you as long as you live—I honor and respect that girl you tried to harm, beyond any one or anything I've ever known, my mother included. That subject is ended between us, and *look to yourself,* if you revive it. From this time on you know no such person. She will cease to exist even in your recollection. *You hear me, Calvin Bronson?"*

"Yes," articulated the other through blue lips.

"Very well," said Varek. "Now we come to business. I've gone a long way back in your life and I've unearthed a lot. I have under my hand here, in this place, a man whom you used to know by the name of Stevens; he calls himself Doane now. He is a crook and a gambler, but he can give cold facts about your law practice that you can't face. He knows about your first marriage, and why that girl left you in a few weeks." Bronson had stirred, and Varek paused.

"I see you know him," he said. "Well, I myself can vouch for a few unsavory things that you have always been afraid I would talk about. I also ran across the old man who was one of Carew's witnesses, and the woman can be reached. She overheard more than one conversation between you and Carew, and it was she who saved this paper from the fire." Varek took from his breast pocket a paper that was yellowed and blackened at the edges, and held it up before Bronson's blood-shot eyes. "There's a part of one page gone, but the signatures are intact, and she can swear to it. It's your agreement—you recognize it?" He watched the ghastly face before him a moment. "Do you want more time to think it over, or are you ready to hear my terms now?" he asked.

Bronson seemed to find difficulty in speaking, but he brought out his "Go on," at last, and he even drew himself together a little.

"Well, here it is," said Varek. "You will bring me every paper in your possession relating to this transaction with Carew, and these papers we will place in an envelope and seal. With them you will put a statement written by yourself to the effect that, having been unable to meet the terms of the agreement, you turn over to Mrs. Carew or her heirs their rightful property. You will also bring with you the packet of letters that you once filched from Carew's belongings—they were six in number—and you will destroy

them in my presence. Then we will go to some reputable lawyer, it doesn't matter to me who it is, provided he is sound, and we will place this envelope in his keeping until such time as it is called for by Mrs. Carew, or one or both of her children. Neither you nor I can touch it. So much for that. Next, you shall resign from the Presidency of the Whery Company, and from its board altogether, and you will turn over to me shares in that Company covering the amount you took from me in New York. And thirdly, you will from this day on, cease in any way to interest yourself in my affairs, private or public, or the affairs private or public of any member of the Carew family. As you keep this agreement, so will I keep mine, not to molest or disturb you in any particular." Varek stopped and looked at the bent head before him, and it struck him suddenly that the man looked shrunken, and that the skin of his hands had the glazed, wrinkled look one sees in the hands of the old. A curious sensation as of a oneness of shame with the flabby, crouching figure in its chair, passed over him. But it went as it came, Business was business with Varek, and the sight of a wrinkled hand with twitching fingers could not deter him. He was well aware that were he sitting in Bronson's place, Bronson would dictate no such easy terms to him.

"If this thing should come to a settlement,"

Varek continued, "you haven't a shadow of a leg to stand on. I could run you out of town, to say the least of it. Take your time to decide, I'm in no hurry," and he turned to his desk.

Bronson was silent a long time, but not because of any doubt of his compliance; on the contrary he felt he had come off better than he expected. The land he could spare though it meant wealth in the near future; the renunciation of his influence and direction in the Whery Co. hit him hard, but it was none of these things that possessed him. He was sick and shaken by abject physical terror, and neither shame nor anger had any part in it. He would have days and nights in which to think of his position, but just now he had place for only one idea. He had done many things in his life to which he would decline to give a name, and he had glided more than once from under the hand of the law, but he had never had violence done him. The shivering, physical coward in him crouched paralyzed. If he could gather together strength enough to stand and if possible walk out under the terrible eyes of that man whose finger-marks burned on his neck, it was what he wanted most. If he could go where he was safe and collect himself, he might get together courage enough to enter his presence again.

At length he dragged himself up, but he staggered at Varek's sudden turn towards him, and lifted

his hand as if to ward off a blow. "I agree to everything," he said, his shrinking eye on the younger man. "I will come first thing in the morning."

"All right," answered Varek. "No, go out this way. You don't need to go through the office," and he opened the door of his private entrance for him, and as the big figure shambled out, Varek had a correct guess of what Bronson's furtive glance backward meant.

III.

THE HOUSE ON THE BLUFF

VAREK hailed a south-bound car, and took his seat with a half-suppressed sigh of satisfaction. It was Saturday evening, the end of a particularly busy week, and he longed to get home. He had not had a sight of it for two days, and the car seemed to him to crawl.

That morning he had concluded his affair with Bronson, and he was done with him, he hoped, forever. The night before he had been kept very late at a business dinner at the club, and the day had been a rush from one thing to another. He felt a weariness of tobacco smoke, and business, and men. It was a feeling that had grown on him during the last two months. It did not bother him much in the busy day, his head had never been so clear, or his confidence in himself more assured, and he could put through an immense amount of work; but when evening came it was not just to look forward to the morrow; the morrow might remove itself an infinite distance away for all he cared. He longed for his bit of heaven—the snowy supper-table with its centre of ever fresh flowers; the softly lighted room above, every object in which was restful; the wide win-

dow and balcony from which he could see the lights of the river-boats always moving up and down, on foggy nights their melancholy sirens piercing the stillness and making the blazing fire a double delight. To-night it would be moonlight and he would take her out there. A warm surge of tenderness swept over him. He had never dreamed that life held anything like this, and it was actually his.

He was astounded at his former ignorance of himself. The little, white, stricken-looking girl that he had forced into his arms and held so tightly, who obeyed him, but with no hint of servility, who took her life so quietly and smiled at him out of the unfathomable blue of her eyes,—did she know that she held him in the hollow of her little hand? She could bend him, or break him if she chose, and he could do nothing but go on loving her more each day that passed, seeking by every art he knew to gain a place in her heart. She had begun to take him into the smaller interests of her life, and of her mother and Paul she always spoke freely to him, but there was a long distance for him to travel yet.

Could he in time win forgiveness from her for the past? He had begun to realize what it was he had done to her. The desire of possession had been really the overpowering motive in him, and it had set aside everything else until it was satisfied. It was too overwhelming in its force to leave room for any-

thing else but his own emotions. Then gradually out of the chaos of his sensations had emerged a new consciousness. It was no longer just the passion of a lover for his mistress, but the love of a man for a wife who was beyond everything adorable. He would hide her carefully, and guard every avenue of approach, she must be his in the mean time, but he would right her in the eyes of any that might know. Neither the law nor his money could accomplish it fast enough. He had fought Bronson for what was left of her birthright, and in due time she should have it. When he had her love, she should not feel that she was his dependent.

And could he win it? Why not—where had he failed yet? After the first he could not discover that she shrank from him. She had locked herself up within herself, and he had no adequate key to her feelings. She appeared to have decided on a course of conduct and adhered to it. There were neither tears, nor depression, nor coquetry. Her manner in general expressed more nearly an indifference that sought not to offend, yet at rare intervals she flashed into a humor that was sarcastic, or almost frivolously contemptuous, a sort of surcharge of inward irritation. But much more often the child appeared in her, sweet and lovable, and again the woman who flushed warmly under his caresses. There were now and then flashes of her inner self that escaped in spite of her rigid reserve, and he began to suspect a capacity for feel-

ing in her that he longed to fathom. She was a mystery and a joy, a child to treat tenderly lest he hurt her, a woman to subjugate in primitive fashion, and a lady to court and win. Varek's mind moved easily in complexities and his joy was his problem as well. Though he did not realize it as yet, the rush of his day was becoming a side issue, and the other the paramount interest.

His car had gained the bluffs, and had passed several old-fashioned houses set so far back in the trees and on the edge of the bluff, that in the twilight they were almost hidden. In front of one of these places, the grounds of which occupied almost the entire block, he alighted, but he did not enter the iron gateway. It and the iron fence were well placarded with signs for rent and sale, and from the dilapidated look of the grounds the place appeared to have been unoccupied for some time. Varek kept on until he reached the corner and then turned down toward the river. The road, for it ceased to be a street here, was cut deeply into the brow of the cliff, running between high, clay-colored, almost perpendicular sides. Varek kept on for some distance, almost to within a few yards of where the road, reaching the edge of the bluff, a veritable jumping-off place, turned suddenly to the right. Here a long flight of steps led up the face of the steep cut, and Varek climbed them. They brought him to the very top of the bluff, some fifty feet above

the road, and the splendid panorama of the broad Mississippi and its setting lay spread out below him. At the left twinkled the lights of the city, and afar off to the right swept the curve of the river into the dim distance; directly opposite, on the Illinois shore, the scattered lights were beginning to appear. A gentle breeze swept along the face of the cliffs, and stirred the budding branches above him, and Varek stopped for a moment and lifted his hat to its coolness. Then he turned to the spot that had claimed his thoughts for hours.

The house was an old, many-gabled, dormer-windowed structure, clinging to the edge of the bluff, all of one side open to the view. It was so far back as to be entirely hidden from the road from which Varek had ascended. The trees and shrubbery, and a high fence at the back and other side, effectually concealed it from the empty mansion whose iron gates Varek had passed. Some idler, floating down the river and amusing himself with his glasses, might have spied the quaint house clinging to the face of the bluff, and even have made out the awning-covered balcony, but had he searched for it on land he would scarcely have found it. Its first owners must have been seeking seclusion as Varek was.

He went on and passed round to the terrace under the balcony. In the fading light a bit of white and a dark head showed above the railing.

"Peggy?" he called, softly.

The head moved and bent toward him, the face in shadow. "Leo," she said, "is it you?"

"I shall be up in a minute," he answered.

He went in by the kitchen, turning a laughing face to the very fat black woman who was frying something savory at the stove.

"Fo' de Lord's sake, Mr. Leo," she exclaimed, "why ain't yo' tel'phone you is comin'! I done twist another chicken neck effen I knowed it."

"Too much of a hurry to get here," Varek called back as he went. "Fry me some chips, Dinah, they'll be good if you cook them."

"I reckon dey will," sniffed the woman, scornfully. "You, Sam, where is yo'?" she shouted.

"I's changin' ma coat," a voice answered from somewhere within; "what yo' want?" Sam showed his yellow face at the pantry door.

"Yo' take dat white coat off quicker'n yo' put it on," commanded Dinah, "an' go out to de chicken-coop and fetch me dat young yaller rooster—go on, I say, ain't yo' see Mr. Leo?"

"I reckon I gets de champagne too," said Sam.

"Yo' get what yo' has a mind ter, but you get me dat chicken fust," said Dinah, grimly whetting the butcher knife.

Varek had gone on into the hall and upstairs, his eyes seeking as he went the wide door of the living-

room. Janet had turned on the lights, and their rose-colored shades cast a rich glow over her as she turned to meet him. She was dressed in some soft, white, clinging material, her neck low to her shoulders, and her arms bare save where little ribbon bows above the elbows held together the flowing sleeves.

She gave her hand to Varek and he kissed it, his eyes on hers, and then with a murmured word of endearment he caught her to him and kissed her long and passionately.

"If Dinah didn't expect me, I hope you did," he said at length, but not letting her go. "God! two whole days without a sight or touch of you! Did you think I could stay away to-night?"

"I thought you would come after supper. I knew you were very busy," Janet answered.

"You put on your prettiest dress for me," said he, touching it.

"It's not nearly as grand as some," she returned, lightly, and drawing herself out of his arms, she made a sweeping gesture backward. "Why, the last has a train on it so long—and it wrapped itself round that table and broke the nose of the big bronze Buddha. It happened yesterday, Leo; won't you look at it?"

"Confound his nose!" said Varek, half amused, half irritated at her escape from him. "I will very

willingly study the same feature on your face, though, Peggy. Please come here and sit down by me."

She stood as if considering, and then came and sat down quietly, and he piled the cushions behind her. While his hand sought the warm, round arm under her flowing sleeve, he gave her half-averted face his usual keen scrutiny.

"You don't look well, little one; is it the heat?" he asked.

"I don't know; I hadn't thought about it," she said, indifferently. "It seemed nice to be on the porch."

"There's a shadow here, and a little line there," Varek went on, touching her cheek, and the corner of her mouth. "What is it, Peggy?—Must I guess?"

"It's Paul," said Janet, quietly. "I didn't want to bother you till after dinner. It's not fair to rush at you with my worries the minute you come in the door. Are you never tired, Leo?" She looked half smiling, half sadly at him from under her long lashes.

"Of what?" he asked, tenderly.

"Oh, of always thinking and deciding things, my affairs as well as yours."

"If you will look at me again, if you will lift your head,—I will tell you what I am not tired of—please, Peggy—just one. I'll leave you alone then, I'll go change and wash up, and talk sensibly to you about Paul. Please, sweetheart!"

She raised her head without either eagerness or reluctance, and received his caress in silence, but when he left her she got up and moved restlessly about, touching the keys of the piano gently as she passed. She was very beautiful in the warm light. The pinched look of want and exhaustion was gone, and her cheek had regained its curve. There was an exquisitely cared-for air about her whole personality. She looked a little taller and older in her sweeping gown, but the greatest change was in her expression. Her face had never been a vivacious one; even when brightened by her smile and the deep light of her wonderful eyes it could not come under that designation—the impression produced was too strong. But now the stillness of her face was extraordinary. A stranger struck by it would have searched his or her memory for a likeness to it, and found it in the still face of some woman who had laid away her only child. It was a strange expression for a girl.

Janet looked up at Varek with a smile when he came in. "I am afraid dinner will be late; are you very hungry?" she asked.

"Just a trifle," he said, grinning. "What's the program?"

"Fried chicken and cream gravy, rice, corn-pone, baked tomatoes, banana fritters, and strawberries," Janet announced, gravely.

"Lord!" laughed Varek, "you're all darkies to-

gether. If you could only get in baked sweet-potatoes and a ham-bone or two, it would be perfect. All that sounds half an hour off though, so come let's talk business now, Peggy. I don't want anything but you and the moonlight afterwards." He drew her down beside him as he spoke. "You went to see Paul then this morning."

"Yes, and, Leo, that man was there, that Doane. Why do they let him come to the hospital? They can keep out any one they choose. Paul was so flushed and excited, and Doane went away, and I think Paul was furious at my having interrupted them. He—he wouldn't speak to me." Her lips quivered.

Varek's face darkened, but he spoke gently. "Don't let it hurt you, dear; he's just a sick boy."

"I felt so angry at their letting that man come that I asked for the head nurse, and she said that it was Dr. Friederhof's express order that Mr. Doane should be allowed to come often. What does it mean, Leo?"

"Does your mother know anything about it?" asked Varek.

"Oh, no!" said Janet, horrified. "She thinks there are hopes of Paul's getting well—poor little mother."

"There are hopes; Friederhof has convinced me of it," said Varek, positively. "I should have told you the whole thing, but I didn't want you thinking about it. He says, Peggy, that your brother Paul is no more lame than you or I. The examinations

show nothing at all the matter with his back; he just imagines it."

"Paul not a cripple!" said the girl, in utter amazement. "Leo, what do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Friederhof declares that he can walk if he will. He calls him a self-hypnotic, and he has studied him carefully."

"Paul walk!" said Janet, almost in a whisper. "Will you tell me next that mother is not blind?" She was very pale.

"I wish I could, sweetheart, but your mother is happy and Paul is not. It's been Friederhof's problem to find a way of rousing him. He says that if Paul can have such a tremendous interest that it will drive out the idea of his imagined condition he will, if surrounded by entirely new influences, not revert to it. Of course, he had to work a lot on theory. At first he let your brother have some medical books and he paid careful attention to Paul's interest in what he read. He says it's all been just the fostering of his one morbid idea. Aside from that reading, Paul hasn't taken a particle of interest in anything at the hospital. I told him of Paul's passion for gambling and the influence of this Doane, and Friederhof determined, if we would allow him, to try an experiment. I told him that though I acted as guardian, you would be the one to decide." Varek paused at the girl's troubled, wondering look.

"Leo, he doesn't mean to take that way?" she asked.

"Well, now listen to Friederhof's plan, and he has experimented enough with Paul to feel sure that it will work. He will make Paul feel that he is in a way a prisoner and watched. He will take away his crutches, and tell him to keep his bed, and be pretty sharp about it. He will let Doane see him and talk to him, and at a word from us, and some money, Doane will help us. It will be Paul's interest in gambling primarily that will be worked upon, but once out and on his feet, and capable like other men, Friederhof says he won't fall back. Why just think, it would be like offering a world of new things to a man who has been locked up from his childhood. Doane would have to take charge of him for a while, for he is the only one who has any influence with him. I know Doane, and I can fix him to steer Paul away rather than into trouble. Then when your brother gets his bearings, he must have other surroundings. Here I come in with my plan to Friederhof. I have a ranch in Colorado far enough away from cities to make it feasible. If Paul shows himself capable of being interested in sensible things, I propose to send him out there. The manager is as square a man as I know, and he keeps a fairly clean, well-behaved lot of men under him, and Paul can have his chance. Your brother hates me because I am big and strong, but I

have an idea that if he can walk as straight as the rest, he will try to emulate them. It's a lot guesswork, Peggy, but it's for you to say."

"I seem to have hard things to decide," said Janet, painfully, "and I have no knowledge, nothing but my feelings to help me."

"They are truer than wise men's conclusions, little one." Varek touched her bent head tenderly, and all that was best in him showed in the look he gave her.

"I have no right to deprive Paul of his chance—but, oh, Leo, I am afraid, so afraid of the future." She looked up and caught the light in his face. It was not the only time in the last weeks that she had seen the look that she trusted. If only it was not wiped out so soon by all that came between. As she knew it would, his face changed.

"Our futures are mostly what we make them," he said, in his abrupt way. "Now let me give you a piece of advice, Peggy, and it's sound: never worry over a venture; that's one of the first rules. There will be one of the cleverest specialists in this country with his eye on Paul, and my level head is at his service as well. To my mind it's a good chance to win out. Smile on me a little to-night, Peggy, I need it,—and let the rest go to—well—Guinea."

"Mr. Leo," said Sam at the door, "here am yo' cocktail, suh, and Dinah, she says dinner am on de table in five minutes."

IV.

THE BALCONY

"WHERE'S your wrap?" asked Varek, as they stepped out on the balcony an hour later. "It's warm out here, but you must have something round you."

"I have my coat," said Janet.

"I don't mean that thing," Varek said, in disgust. "It has sleeves; I mean that long loose one Lassie barks at."

"Oh, my cape—but, Leo, please wait a minute—I have forgotten something," and she sped off downstairs.

"What's up now, I wonder," said Varek. He was flushed after his dinner and he wanted his coffee and a cigar. He waited rather impatiently, leaning against the open French window.

Presently Janet appeared, walking slowly and holding her hands to her bosom. Sam brought up the rear with the coffee cups, and a beautifully marked little fox-terrier trotted beside her, its head cocked up at an interested angle. Janet's eyes were shining, and her red lips parted.

"Sit down, Leo, please, I want to show you something," she said. She slipped to the floor beside him then, and laid her two hands gently on his knees. In

the hollow of each hand lay a tiny puppy, the small noses nuzzling her warm palm. Lassie, resting two nervous paws on Janet's arm, surveyed her property with an air of mingled pride and anxiety, while the delight of a small child radiated her mistress's upturned face.

"Bless my soul!" cried Varek. "So, Lassie, you have gone and done it!"

"Leo, they are so soft and wriggly," said the girl. "Put your face down and touch them. Aren't they dear? Dinah came half way down the steps to tell me, when I got back from my drive. Sam says they are beauties, that he took care of kennels once."

"They're like baby white rats," said Varek teasingly, his eyes on the girl at his knee, not the puppies.

"*I* don't think so!" returned Janet, indignantly. "You don't appreciate them. They are soft and pretty—all but their tails," she added, eying doubtfully the slender appendages that tickled her wrists. "I wish they had been short like Lassie's."

Varek's features underwent a sudden convulsion, and Sam snorted. "When I done bitten dem off——" he began.

"Put that tray down, you idiot!" interposed Varek in a tone that made Sam jump a foot. "Don't you see you are spilling my coffee?"

Janet gazed after the retreating Sam in amazement, but Varek was appreciating the puppies. "I

was teasing you, Peggy," he said. "They are just about the best-marked pups I ever saw. They're cunning toads, sure enough."

The girl's puzzled look brightened a little. "I'm wondering what to name them," she said.

"Well, how would Trip and Trick do? They have the advantage of suiting either gender." Varek's face was perfectly serious, but the girl moved from under the hand he had laid on her shoulder.

"I reckon they would rather go to bed than be christened," she said, carelessly. "If you will ring, Sam can get them." She stood looking down at her hands until he came with the basket and then she laid them gently down. "Don't you drop them, Sam," she cautioned. She turned to Varek with her light lift of lip and shoulder. "Now, Leo, my cape, and the porch, and your coffee you have been hankerin' for so long."

Varek knew that he had hurt her, and he was sorry. Yet he rather liked the way she held her head as she served his coffee. He had turned on the porch light, and she sat with her back to the wall of darkness beyond. She had dropped her wrap, and the blackness framed her, bringing out the beautiful lines of neck and arm. Varek as he finished his coffee and feasted his eyes was surprised as he had been many times before at her wonderful self-control. Her face had quivered with a pain born of an emotion too

strong for only his teasing manner to have caused, yet her hand was steady and her head high. She merely touched her coffee, and setting her cup down she half turned, and gazed fixedly into the darkness. The somber quiet of her face was as far removed as the poles from the look that had made it vivid a few moments before.

Varek had the sudden feeling of isolation that sometimes touched him like a cold breath; an urgent desire to know what it was she was pondering. He would ask his question, and be answered as he had been frequently before; a little later her head would lie on his breast, but he would know only what he could guess of what was passing in her mind.

He bent toward her. "A thousand dollars for your thoughts, Peggy," he said, and she scarcely turned her head. "What extravagance! Where is your business sense?" she returned, lightly. "They're not worth the usual penny."

"You might let me judge."

"Will you have the light while you smoke?" she asked, coldly.

"We'll have it dark," he said. "Maybe I'll feel then that you're not a mile away."

He drew up a settee and flung an armful of cushions into it, and they were suddenly wrapped in warm darkness. Dinah's laugh, subdued, came floating up to them from the back, and then it was very still.

Varek smoked, and Janet drew her wrap more closely about her, her eyes on the scattered lights that danced in the black abyss.

"Look, sweetheart," said Varek, touching her. Far away, and below them as it seemed, there showed a curved rim of light, slowly emerging as out of an inky ocean. "The moon," said Janet softly,—"how quickly it grows."

Varek threw his cigar far out from the balcony, and it made a curve, its lighted tip visible as it fell. His groping hands sought her in the darkness. "Won't you forgive me, Peggy, for teasing in there?" he asked. "I love you a thousand times more for being a little girl like that. I wonder sometimes how I dare touch you."

"Oh, *I* don't mind," said Janet, quick to ward off a scene. "It's silly of me to care for little soft things like that, and not to understand about fox-terrier's tails. Do they always bite them off when they are little?" and she shivered, disgustedly.

"It's supposed to be the proper method," said Varek, "but I'll wring Sam's neck for him. Peggy, is there no way to get inside this winding-sheet you have around you? I'll bet the coat I got for you today will be easier to handle."

"Another coat," said the girl, wearily. "Leo, I wish you would believe me when I tell you that I have more of everything than I want."

"I wasn't thinking of your needing it, I am afraid," said Varek. "I got it because of your eyes. It's all greens, with water-lilies, and stems, and leaves standing out all over it, and running up from the tail. It's a thing with big bags for sleeves and it's not got any collar. It folds over something like my smoking-jacket, and I bought it of five grinning Japs. Peggy, it's a beauty!"

"It must be," said Janet, laughing in spite of her annoyance. "What a description!—Possibly it's a kimono?"

"I don't know anything about the name of the creature," Varek continued, earnestly, "but it is the shade of green I have wanted for months. It'll make your eyes as blue as it makes Peg Woffington's in that little painting I have at the office. That's why I've always called you 'Peggy,' did you know it? I got a good look at your eyes one day, and they were the shade that Irishman gave Mistress Woffington. Why, I spent an hour getting it for you this afternoon, and kept three railroad men waiting a half hour, swearing themselves blue in the face, and I was as tickled as if I had put through a hundred thousand dollar deal. Now, don't you want your coat, Peggy?"

"You spend too much time thinking about me," said Janet.

"Do I? Well, I can't help it then. Peggy, you warm little round thing! How I have wanted you!

I have been longing for this all day. What do you think is going to become of me if I go on like this? I thought a month ago that I loved you with every bit of me, and here it's nothing compared to to-day. You will give me a little in return—by and by—you will out of pure pity? Is there no way I can touch the woman in you? I sometimes think that if I kissed you long enough you would find your heart!" He spoke fiercely, his hot lips on hers.

"Hush," she sighed,—"you hurt me so!" He loosened his hold a little, and they sat silent, save for his quickly drawn breath, and her eyes closed wearily. The moon climbed higher, gradually dispelling the darkness, its pale light creeping in between the branches and marking their shadows on the ground. It stole in under the awning, and rested on Janet's quiet face, and Varek's hot brow. He looked down at her head on his breast, and her perfect stillness helped to calm him. "Patience, have patience," said the voice within him,—"you urge too much."

The headlight of an engine came slowly round the far distant curve of the river, and drew its length glow-worm-like along the foot of the bluffs. "The train, Peggy," Varek whispered. She raised her head, watching it, and presently it passed below them with a roar and shrill whistle, making its way up river into the smoke and clatter of the city.

"I have described and described this to mother," Janet said, "all this view; do you think she can really have any idea of it? It was pleasant enough to take her driving this morning, and we went to the park. I think she looks a little better every day, and she is as merry as a bird. I loved to hear her." Varek knew why she spoke. It was her way of telling him that if she did not give him what he asked for, she was at least grateful for her mother's sake. It was pathetic in its appeal to him, and he met it half way.

"Your mother and I are great friends," said he, "and I like to hear her talk. You have some of her gestures, but you are not really alike. She was telling me the other day when I went to see her about your running off to a darky camp-meeting when you were little, and when they found you, you were calmly sitting on the mourner's bench, taking in everything that went on."

"I remember," laughed Janet, softly. "They are fun, the old-fashioned darkies."

"I haven't any patience with them," said Varek. "They are born thieves, every one of them, and so confounded lazy."

"But such a comfort, Leo, for they make one laugh, and forget things. Last night one of them came up with a banjo from that settlement down by the river, and I lay out here in the hammock and I forgot I was not in Virginia. There, when the spring

nights came, like to-night, you could hear the banjos at the cabins, and I would run through the fields, though I was afraid of the dark, and sit with the pickaninnies and listen, and Mammy Wilda would come after me and forget to take me home, for they would dance."

Varek looked down into her wide eyes with a tightening in his throat. "Do you like to dance, little one?" he asked. What return was he giving her for her youth?

She leaned back against his arm with a long drawn breath. "Yes," she said, "Miss Editha taught me. She was very poor and old, but they were the grandest people before the war. She used to go to the most beautiful balls in Baltimore and Washington, and was a great belle; but the war killed her father, and brother, and lover, and she had no one. Though she was old she was very graceful. She taught me the little I know of music too. She used to scold me if I talked like the darkies, and she would make me say my words right—I loved Miss Editha."

"Have you danced much, Peggy?" There was growing in him a jealousy of that past of which she always spoke so happily.

"I've been to just one ball in my life," said the girl, wistfully.

"At your home, little one?"

"No, in New York. Father took me with him

once, when I was sixteen, and I stayed a month. I felt ten years older when I went home, I had learned so much; the theatres, and drives, and the ball! I had a beautiful dress for it, and I was terrified beforehand for fear I wouldn't behave right, but when I saw the lights, and the flowers, and the pretty dresses, I forgot. Then when the music came, I was 'clane outside of mesilf,' as Lizzie says."

"I suppose you had a few partners," said Varek, rather grimly.

"Yes, but I didn't behave myself very well after all," said Janet, smiling in reminiscence. "There were such a lot of men coming up and scribbling on my program, and then I forgot all about them, and danced most of the time with one man."

"You did!" said Varek, sharply. "Who was he?"

"His name was Dorsey Carroll, and he took me to supper, and he certainly did dance beautifully!"

"Some cub," Varek growled, contemptuously. "What did he look like?"

Janet noticed his tone for the first time, and a gleam of mischief shone under her lashes. She was for the time being back in that bright ball room with all the new sensations it had aroused in her, and she unconsciously looked and spoke her part. In her restlessness she had jerked loose from the tight rein she usually kept on herself.

"He was as tall as you, and fair, and he had broad shoulders, but his eyes were the nicest. He wasn't a cub either, he was ever so much older than I, for he had finished college. He talked so well, and was so handsome, I didn't want to dance with any one else. Then too he was clever enough to know how to keep me to himself."

"Yes, damned impudence!" said Varek, in a fury. "Where was your father all this time?"

"I think he was talking to a lady in the conservatory."

"And I suppose you have been dreaming about that fellow ever since, curse him!" said Varek, his face working. "Have you seen him since?" He tightened his hold on her roughly, and she looked up into his face, but the sight of it brought the burning color into her own. A flood of shame and heartsickness swept over her. Was this the way she kept her word to herself? What right had she to be talking or thinking of her girlhood. It belonged to another life, another being entirely.

"I was only teasing, I don't know why," she said dully. "Excuse me, Leo."

"Don't do it again, Peggy; it makes me sick all over with rage. I dreamed one night you cared for some one, and I think I killed him twenty times before I woke up. It would be easy for you to drive me mad, but you won't do it; I've seen mighty little

of the cat in you." He spoke thickly, and Janet had no answer to make. If she had been alone she would have walked up and down as she had the night before, as she had on many other nights. It seemed to her that he must understand the impatient beating of the heart that lay under the pressure of his hand; in the perfect stillness each throb sounded loud in her ears. It was Varek who spoke later on. "Peggy, does it mean a lot to you, all that background of yours?" he asked. "I mean knowing who your great-grandfathers were, and all that?"

"In a way it does," she answered, slowly. "But it hurts—too."

Varek did not seem to hear her remark, for he was following out his own thoughts. "There's precious little I have to look back on in the way of ancestry," he said musingly. "The only relative I ever possessed to my knowledge, was my mother. She was a Russian, Peggy, a Russian Jewess—not just a common immigrant, and I know that from an incident, one of the first things I can remember. She took me with her to the docks one day to meet some of her people, and I gathered that they were from her own part of the country. They were a wretched lot, but the men touched their foreheads to her and the women dipped in a sort of courtesy, and she spoke to them like one who had the right to command.

"My mother worked most of the day in some fac-

tory, but in the evenings she would teach English to the foreigners that came, Jews and Germans, that were eager to learn. She must have known the language well before she came to this country, for she spoke it so well, and German too. She was a very handsome woman, tall and stately, and I stood in awe of her. She died when I was nine years old, but she fixed her impression on me before she went. She walked with me more than once in the heart of the city. 'This greatness about you, Leo,—it is all possible to you,' she would say. 'It lies here in thy little head alone,—learn then to use it well. This country —it is the future of my people,'—she never once said 'our people' to me, and she would speak nothing to me but English. Poor as we were, she kept me rigidly at school, and she would have no idleness. 'These that run in the street,' she would say, 'they will still run there when you are like a king above them. It is money makes a king in this land, learn then to win it.'" Varek paused. "I can see the look of her now as plainly as I did then. She had a wonderful will." He drew a deep breath before he went on. "Peggy, I know no more who my father was than you do; no reference to him ever crossed my mother's lips, but the old white-haired Jew who came when she died told me all I've ever known. 'It is thy mother's wish that thou shalt grow up among thy father's people,' he said; 'he was a Gentile;' and he put me in

a German family, where I lived until my mother's little savings were gone, and then I fended for myself." Varek stopped.

"I am glad you have told me about your mother," Janet said, thoughtfully.

"Why, Peggy?"

"It explains you in some ways."

"So you think about me sometimes, do you, little one? I am going to hunt up my beginnings now; there are a few things I should like to know, now I have you. I never cared a red cent about it before." Janet was silent and Varek sank into one of his reveries, and it was very still again. A night bird flew close to them with a soft whir of wings. Out of the pale lights and shadows far below them there sounded the notes of some stringed instrument touched carelessly, and Janet moved, listening. It came again, nearer, accompanied by a ripple of laughter, and Varek bent his cheek to her dark hair. "What is it, sweetheart?" he asked.

"It's on the road coming up from below; it's a banjo, and I know from the laugh they're darkies. Listen, Leo!" The laughter grew more distinct, bearing clearly the abandon of the negro; even Varek recognized it. The banjo strummed a cord or two and the voices rose in an accompaniment, a minor repetition.

"They are coming here," said Janet in suppressed

excitement. "Leo, they'll build a bonfire and sing. I'm so glad—so glad!" He had no heart to growl his annoyance in face of her joy.

They had reached the road below and the murmured recitative ceased, a clear high tenor rising alone in the refrain:

> "Climb, climb, climb highest mountin,
> Sailin' up in a balloon,
> All about among de starlight,
> All around de silver moon."

They had reached the top, and the voices dropped into titters, broken now and then by a shriller note. They passed on the other side of the house, respecting the balcony, and came out at the back. A broad shaft of light from the opened door fell on them, and Dinah's high laugh came in welcome, amid a hubbub of voices.

"Fo' de Lord's sake, so you is come!" There were scraps of greeting. "Mr. Johnsing, I certainly am glad to meet yo'. How is yo' likin' dis part of de country?" and, "Sally, I reckon yo' bref ain't come back yet. Sam, git out de mats—et's mighty col' on de groun'."

"Leo, let's sit over here where we can see," whispered Janet. There was a big chair at the corner of the porch, and she perched herself on one of the arms, but Varek sat down and drew her over on his knee. "Now," he said, "amuse yourself. I am satisfied."

She shrugged impatiently, but her interest was below. The group sat half in, half out, of the band of light, and a dark figure moved about behind them. Presently there twisted up in the moonlight a spiral of smoke, followed by a darting tongue of flame.

"I knew it!" said Janet, clasping and lifting her hands in a little gesture Varek loved, "it's a bonfire!" A chorus of joy caught up the scattered voices swinging into rhythm:

"I took ma gal to a ball one night,
It was a social hop;
We danced all night, till bro'd daylight;
The music then did stop.
I took her to a res-ter-rant,
De finest on de street;
She said she was n't hungry,
But dis am what she eat——

Climb, climb, climb de highes' mountin,
Sailin' up in a balloon, a balloon,
All around among de starlight,
All about de silver moon."

"Ya, ha!" laughed the women, shrilly, but the clear tenor fell into another note—a moaning refrain —the banjo joining softly:

A-hung, a-hung,
'I say Miss Mousey, is you within?'
A-hung, a-hung!
'Lift de latch an' do come in,'
A-hung, a-hung!"

Then all the group swung in more loudly:

"'He took Miss Mousey on his knee,
A-hung, a-hung!
He took Miss Mousey on his knee,
'I say, Missy Mouse, will yo' marry me?'
A-hung, a-hung!"

The fire blazed high and danced redly on the group, touching here a black mask in which the whites of the eyes showed oddly, and there a grinning mouth. There was the guttural note of the savage and the high shrill call of his mate. It needed only the naked man and the woman with her straw apron, and it might have been Central Africa.

The banjo never stopped its insistent twang, gradually turning into a measure that jerked at the muscles. "Ah," said Janet, "now!" She bent over with parted lips. The group stirred, some rising, and a woman's voice rang out clear, "Yah, ha." They turned about, beating time with hands and feet. A big turbaned woman sprang up in their midst, and they parted to either side, leaving her in the firelight. She caught up her skirts and stepped in time to the music, as light as a feather. Janet was up too, her body swaying in rhythm with them, her hands beating time. "Dinah, oh, Dinah!" she called, clearly. "Yah, ha!" the woman called back, and another, and another, joined and swayed with her, back and forth, back and forth.

Varek gazed at the girl before him absolutely fascinated. She had tossed her hair back from her brow, and her great eyes danced and gleamed. A dark spot showed on each cheek, and her lip lifted over her white teeth. The repression of months was cast to the winds; the primitive woman he had searched for in her stood revealed.

The insistent twang and beat stopped dead; the fire dropped to a glow; a cloud swept over the face of the moon, and in the warm darkness Varek's arms went round her. "To be like that, and not to care!" she was whispering, and his voice answered in her ear, "Why not? There are just you and I in all this world—little one!"

V.

OLD HEDRICK'S MISSION

JANET drew the fur closer about her throat as she slowly descended the flight of steps that led to her aerie. A stout, red-faced coachman was turning his horses with a practised hand so as to bring the step of the coupé as close as possible to the last step of the flight. A furious thunder-storm the night before had put a sudden end to the four unnaturally warm days, and the wind that swept up from the river was cold.

The man jumped down and held the door for her, touching his hat to her as he did so. "Good-morning, Denison," she said, in her low voice. "Will you please take me to the west entrance of Carr's, and you can either drive about or wait as you like, but I shall not need you for two hours at least."

"Yes, Miss."

Janet got in and Denison put the warm robe about her knees. She was heavily veiled as usual, and the man could hardly see her features, but it seemed to him that her voice was particularly lifeless. He had never climbed those steps, or driven her in any other way but quite alone, or with her mother, but he was a man of much experience in the ways of the city, and he had his surmises. Varek's injunctions were posi-

tive and betokened strong interest. He was to guard the lady as the apple of his eye, and the horses Varek turned over to him were picked for their good qualities. He never touched liquor, and had a thorough respect for his monthly wage, and Varek trusted his treasure to him. He kept a close tongue, but there was no embargo on his thoughts.

As he was about to close the door, Janet held it a moment. "Your little girl, Denison, is she better?"

"Yes, Miss, thank you," said the man with a grateful look. "She's been better, Miss, every day since those flowers. My wife says you cured her."

He climbed to his seat, but Varek's commands as to careful driving were not needed. Janet had won him as she did most who knew her. She had noticed his face one day, and learned from him that his only little girl was desperately ill. She had thrown back her veil and listened to his few broken words with sympathy in her great eyes, and then she was off and up the steps like a bird. When she came back her arms were full of flowers, orchids and great, creamy pink roses. "Take them to her," she said, breathless. "Go right back. You shan't leave her till she is better." He would like to meet the man who would guide those two grays more carefully than he; he knew a good woman and a lady when he saw one, let appearances be what they might.

They went north and city-wards on Broadway, past

the old houses on the bluffs. Save for one or two families, nobody knew who lived in those old houses any more. Several were vacant. The fashionable of a city have strange tastes as to location, and they flock like sheep after a leader. They built their mansions in flat places and cinder-filled holes, and gazed complacently on each other's stone fronts, while beauty and seclusion lay close at hand.

Janet was not giving attention to her surroundings, however. Her thoughts were turned inwards, busied with herself. She was passing the last two months over in retrospect, and she felt an actual physical nausea. It had come to the final decision, whether she could better endure her mother's sufferings and Paul's ruin, or her own, and she had chosen; she had not expected to see her mother happy and Paul cared for at any small price to herself, but the desolation within her was beyond anything she could have imagined. Janet was one of those who in adverse circumstances can turn within for comfort. Her thoughts had always been normal, and her spirit bright. She never could have passed through those months of bitter poverty, had she not had a well-spring of self-respect, and a trust in her own clean nature. But she had been swept by a storm that left her rudderless. She had known how others would look upon her, but she had not realized how she would look upon herself. That came afterwards. She could

no longer turn her thoughts inward; they were met by a blank wall of disgust.

She often paused in her restless misery to wonder why she did not bitterly hate the man who had made it all possible, but the answer was sufficient to her reason. It was because she could see his point of view so clearly. A monumental selfishness and an absolute belief in his right to take her, and his power to make her happy afterwards, had made possible what he had done. He had acted consistently throughout, and from conviction. She could not for a moment doubt the sincerity of his feeling for her; she was appalled by its force and continued appeal to her. His strength, and his type of intellect oppressed her, but she would have been no woman had she failed in a way to respect it. What had appeared to her the most terrible thing possible, was to him an incident that could be largely remedied. He had forced his offer upon her, but she had accepted. It was she who had been traitor to herself and done violence to every instinct she possessed. Her standpoint regarding Varek was extreme, but it was born of her more intimate knowledge of him and her passionate disgust at herself.

It was not the least of her miseries that now her mother's society pained her. She had built a wall of deceit between them. Nothing but Mrs. Carew's perfect joy could have made it endurable. Her chil-

dren had been saved from ruin, a little of what was rightfully theirs had been restored to them through the efforts of the man whom Mrs. Carew regarded as their preserver. She acquiesced entirely in his arrangements for their respective needs. She was an invalid and required constant care, which she could have hourly in the bright, cheerful sanitarium Varek had chosen for her. Paul must be placed where he could have the best of treatment, but Janet would have to do something toward her own living; there was not enough for them all, Mrs. Carew understood, but the position he found for Janet, as companion to a wealthy friend, who was lonely in her quiet life, promised every comfort for her daughter, and Janet would be free to spend every morning with her mother. It made little difference to Mrs. Carew where she was herself, provided the best was being done for her children, and Varek gave her every assurance. He had saved Janet everything possible, but to her the prevarications seemed endless. Her loathing of it all would drive her at last to a worse evil.

From her first knowledge of him, Varek's determined appeal had been to the emotional in her. It had been silent in the beginning, then more open and accompanied with the threat that she could not escape him. Even when this appeal had been reinforced by his growing tenderness, it had been just as great,

no greater, and now what was it like every day? she had turned, and twisted, and evaded in vain. In her loneliness and isolation from herself she had moved imperceptibly nearer and considered it. She could not love him, though she had no definition for what the word meant to her. It simply meant the impossible as applied to him; he did not touch a cord of sympathy in her. He respected her now, for he had not seized that something that she had held high out of his reach; but if she flung herself at his feet as he sought to have her do, he would in time trample on her. "If she can only learn to love me, she will be happier," Varek argued. This she could not do, she did not know why, but she could go mad for mere emotion's sake. Her own restless misery had dragged it forth; outwardly she was an abandoned woman, why not be abandoned? She had it in her to scream "yah, ha," like that black woman, to drink the champagne he put to her lips—and end in the gutter, like those haggard creatures that used to elbow her on her evening walks homeward. Still like the drunkard she would have had her moments of oblivion. The truth was that she was living abnormally, with a strain too great for her already tortured nerves, and nature was avenging itself as it has with many another unfortunate.

The last few days had brought the possibility closer, and she was turning this way and that for

relief. If she could only bring back the courage that had walked with her during all those cold months of trial, she might rise superior. Hitherto she had carefully avoided every spot that had known her, but this morning there had come a longing to go again over the old ground, and see if possibly she could call back the Janet she used to know. She would walk the same streets, and look into the same faces, and stand in that dirty, high-ceilinged hallway.

When they reached Carr's Janet passed directly through the store and came out on Sixth Street. Then going on as far as the corner she chose the quieter side of Olive and went on down to the corner she knew so well. From where she stood she could see the door she used to pass through daily, and she stopped that it might all come back to her. It seemed years since she had stood there. Then she turned and very slowly walked northward. She even put her feet on the very spots in the pavement that she remembered. Two blocks further along she turned up to Broadway, and kept on, still northward. She passed the market and close by the stall where she used to stop for some trifle for their supper. The German woman she always had a word with on these occasions, looked directly at her, but she did not know her in her tailored gown and heavy veil.

The past was more distinct, but it did not shut out the present one iota. A dull depression settled upon

her, and heavy weights hung to her feet; she dragged along. In all those weary months, she had never walked so heavily; her body seemed dead and her spirit numb. What was the use?

She had reached old Hedrick's book-stall, and involuntarily she stopped. The old man was bending over his bit of fire, exactly as he was that night three months ago, and he raised his gray, lined face and saw her. He looked blankly at her at first, and then his eyes lightened a little and he beckoned her in. "So you have come at last," he said.

The girl made him no answer, she scarcely heard him. She was conscious of wanting to sit down, and mechanically took the seat he offered her. In the same mechanical way she noticed that he moved stiffly. He was more bent and very gray, and when she raised her veil she saw the same film in his eyes that one sees in the eyes of a very old dog.

He looked long and silently at her, and as he had said three months before, so he said now, but as if to himself, "You look nearly done."

He had thought about her even during his long illness at the hospital. The big man who stopped at his stall not ten minutes after the girl had gone that night, and had fallen into talk with him, had asked him if he knew anything about her, and he had called her Janet Carew. Carew! old Hedrick's face had shown his interest. The story of Denis

Carew had followed. The old man could describe graphically enough to Varek the latter part of Mr. Carew's downward course. "He just lost hold on his soul," Hedrick said, and Varek, who knew nothing of the old man's one controlling idea, had absent-mindedly acquiesced. The thing that Varek had been groping for for weeks had come into his hand and his mind was busy over it.

He had offered the old man assistance. "This is no place for you," he said. "You might as well be out of doors."

"I'll not leave it till I go for good," Hedrick replied; "but if you want to give, I'll take it, for there are those it will save."

Varek had humored him, and when the old man had succumbed to the bitter weather, he had him taken to the hospital. But first he promised to keep his stall intact for him, and back to it he had crept as soon as he was able. His span of life was nearly done and connected thought was difficult.

He bent forward now, his dim eyes searching Janet's face. "You are losing hold on your soul," he said in a low voice. "You are letting it go fast."

If he had said any ordinary thing, she might not have answered, or if she had it would have been as mechanically as she had taken his seat. But they were the very words that had been forming in her mind for days, and it scarcely even surprised her.

Her eyes widened. "Yes," she said, clearly, "I am."

"I knew it," he answered, with profound earnestness. "I know the look. Haven't I seen it—often and often? I have sat where you sit, and I have looked out and seen it on the faces that have passed back and forth. Sometimes they stop and lift those yellow backed books out there, and then I go out and we talk, and little by little they will tell me—men and women. They have come in here and sat where you sit and I have told them what it was they were letting go, and they have said, 'But I have done this and that—we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us.' And I say it is not true." The old man's back straightened, and his dim eyes lost their film and flashed. "No, it is not true! The health is there if they would but look for it. Who shall say, 'This man is damned,'—and what right have I to say of myself, 'I am damned'?"

Janet bent forward, her hands held in her lap. "Yes, but it is there—in you," she said, "your loathing of yourself and your life, and there is no way but to forget.'

The old man's face worked passionately. "Aye!" he said, "that's it always, 'to forget, to forget'. It's that makes more sin than anything else." He struck one shrivelled hand on the other. "And I say to

you, remember—remember always, and look up! Look forward and not back, and *hold fast to your soul.*"

"There is no forward," said the girl. "There can be no change. What I have done I must abide by."

The old man was silent looking at her. It seemed as if he were for the first time taking a personal view of the trouble in her face. In a disjointed way circumstances came back to him. She had been poor; she looked affluent. With the signs of plenty upon her, she wore a look of tragedy. He could not remember anything for long at a time, but he did remember the man who had followed after her, yes, more than once, for he had seen him, and talked with him too. In some way it was all connected with things further back in his life, but he could not put them together. He knew now what it was he had thought at the hospital, and it was this—did the man mean well by her? Evidently he had not. . . . It was all confused in his mind again, but he had an impression of what her words meant, and he went back to his idea.

"It is done then—it cannot be changed. Is that any reason for despair? Is it not rather to say, 'I have stepped aside, but it *shall not* sink me utterly.' To gather together all your strength to go forward? You have held your misery close to you, and you have turned it this way, and that, and brooded over it, until

it has grown to be a mountain. Then you fling yourself down and say, 'I cannot bear it; I will plunge deeper and forget.' It is something like that?" The girl's lips moved without sound, and he went on.

"Has it never occurred to you that there are numbers of people near you who have had as great a trouble in their lives as yours, only they may have found it harder to bear. Is there nothing in your life that you can turn to good? Are there none that you could comfort, or who are dependent upon you for happiness? Is there no way that you can find of holding on to your soul?" He had come back to his repetition. His chin sank on his breast and he talked to himself, oblivious of her presence.

"You sinned for the sake of those you loved, to give them the joys of life, and you paid the penalty. Still through all those years you did not faint. You said, 'I will go back to them, I acted in ignorance and out of my love, but they will understand.' But they cast you out utterly. Then you wandered desolate, and you said, 'This I cannot bear,' and you sank your soul deep under crime, and again you paid the long penalty. You grovelled and howled like a beast, and the spark almost died out within you—but not quite. It lies in every human being even to the end—in some near at hand, in others all but out of reach. Painfully you fanned it back into life again, and it was a long and weary time, and you came out of the struggle

an old man, but you never let it go, and when you have seen that spark all but dead in another you have longed to fan it back into flame and give it its chance to win. . . . Sin and suffering and wrong, —they are as old as the world, and they seem to sit upon us mountain high, but it's there still, underneath it all, that vital thing, and whether we struggle manfully, or like a little ignorant child, blunder into mistakes, the thing that counts is that we *do struggle,* struggle to the limit of our power to give that spark the winning chance——" The old man sank into silence, his head bent lower, his hands relaxed on his knees. The girl before him had not moved, but the disjointed monologue had stirred her powerfully; it made far more impression on the emotional chaos in which she was moving than any calm argument.

Suddenly old Hedrick started and leaning forward touched her knee, the wandering look fading from his face. Perhaps in following down his own life he had struck upon a recollection. "I know now," he said more collectedly, "you are Denis Carew's daughter. It was of your father I wanted to tell you—I knew him well at the end. Yes—now listen to me, Denis Carew's daughter——" and he told her every detail of those months of degradation; he drew the picture in all its pitiful reality, and in the language of one who is used to convince. The things that Varek had given emphasis to, he hardly touched upon; the name

of the man who had ruined Carew, had gone entirely from his mind. Old Hedrick had no thoughts of lands or spoils, he was fighting for something far different, and he brought every faculty of his fast-failing mind to bear upon it. He saw the lines in the face before him change, and the eyes fill with new meaning; he was hoarse and spent, but he went on to the end. "He just lost hold on his soul," he whispered. "Will you lose hold on yours, Janet Carew?"

"No!" cried the girl. *"No!"* There was a pain in her throat that smothered her, and the burning tears welled up in her. She flung her head down on the ragged arm of the old chair and sobbed aloud—*"No! No!"* over and over again. The emotions that had tossed her hither and thither during all those wretched weeks must have an outlet. The old man had sunk back, his hands hanging limp by his side.

How long it was before she moaned herself back into silence Janet never knew, but there is an end even to tears, and she dragged herself slowly up and looked about her; the dusty piles of books, the narrow passage, framing the bit of bright April sunshine beyond, and the still figure opposite. She sat gasping and waiting for him to move, but there was no sign, and a terror at his stillness struck her. She got to her feet and lifted one limp hand, but it dropped back heavily; then passing her arm beneath him she raised his head and saw his face, and she knew.

VI.

THE METHODS OF DENIS

"DINIS, if ye don't stand still wan minute," declared Lizzie, "I'm thinkin' it's th' sittin' down place iv ye th' back iv this brush will find."

"But, mither, the horses will rin away without me," pleaded Denis, the muscles of his stocky little legs jerking in spite of him. The brushing of shoes was to Denis an entirely unnecessary operation.

"They'll not rin away without Miss Jannie," said his mother, applying the right side of the brush with a vigor that made his little toes tingle.

"Is he holding them tight, Miss Jannie?" he queried, anxiously.

Janet was sitting on a low chair, holding a bundle on her lap, to which she had been giving much smiling attention. She had a long-stemmed rose in her hand which she was cautiously applying to the indeterminate nose of the bundle, and when two small fists waved and clutched ineffectually, she laughed to herself. She repeated the manœuvre as she answered the little boy, "Yes, as tight as can be."

"An' if they did rin away," pursued the imaginative Denis, "they'd bump him out, wouldn't they, and

rin right over his stummick an' chop him in two? Mither, you've done enough!"

"Ach, go 'long wid ye!" said his mother. "I might as well thry to hold an eel."

Denis made a dive for the door, but collided with a colored woman who was just entering, and perceiving another subject of interest, paused to take note.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. McGinniss," said the intruder, loftily. "I done been requested to fetch you dese surperses from de chapel. De ladies am powerful particular how dey is done up, an' dey requessioned me fo' to say, dey wouldn't have no considerations fo' pore work." The tone of the speaker intimated that in her own mind there was no doubt as to the ultimate dissatisfaction of the ladies, and her whole being breathed the correct attitude of a colored lady brought into contact with Irish trash.

Lizzie looked for a moment as if her visitor and the surplices might suddenly find themselves in the middle of the street, but caution prevailed. "Ye can set thim down," she said, carelessly, giving the woman the benefit of her back. "Now, mither's darlin'," and she took the bundle from Janet's arms.

Denis had eyed the woman thoughtfully as she proceeded to deposit her parcel, and as usual the result of his cogitations found instant voice. "Mither," he said, "I have blackin' on my shoes, but she's got it on her face."

In spite of inward delight Lizzie was severe. "Dinis, do ye mind what I telled ye a minute ago!" she said sharply, but as her visitor swept out with a rolling eye on Denis, who followed at a safe distance, Lizzie whispered to Janet, "Did ye iver hear th' loike!"

"He didn't mean to hurt her feelings," said Janet.

"No," said Lizzie, positively, "iv course an' he didn't; but what I am to do wid him I can't tell! He lost me a washin' jest last week. A grand carriage drove up, an' out stepped th' fattest woman I've set me eyes on since I left Conalty. I had th' chairs in place an' me white apron on in two minutes, an' I wint to th' door. 'Is this Lizzie McGinniss?' says she, high loike. 'That's me own silf, ma'm,' says I bowin', 'an' will ye plase to come in, thin?'

"I hadn't th' chair that would hould her comfortable, but she took that wan and looked at iverythin', mesilf included. 'I wish to have me washin' done,' says she, 'an' it's me custom to see where it goes. I have a great horror of germs, an' th' Irish, as ye must know yersilf, Mrs. McGinniss, are not always cleanly. This is not at all bad, not at all,' says she, sniffin' an' lookin'.

"I felt mesilf overwhelmed wid satisfacthun, but I wasn't expressin' mesilf jest thin. 'Do you iver use bleachin' matter in your wash water?' she says.

"If ye're meanin' soap by that,' says I, 'I'm in th' habit iv usin' it a-plenty.'

"'Oh, no!' says she, 'I refer to delertrerious substances.'

"Whin her mind was rested on that point, she inquired if I dried me clothes in th' sun, an' she hoped I did not kape thim overnight in me bedroom. Thin she handed me her card. 'I am Mrs. Jules-Clarke,' says she, as if I couldn't use me own eyes, 'an' I shall send me clothes on Monday.'

"Now I'm not tellin' ye this to excuse Dinis, Miss Jannie, but I'm jest confessin' that th' very idea had entered me own head—her eyes was so small wid white eye-winkers, an' her neck rollin' over her collar. Dinis was sittin' where ye be, an' he'd niver moved his eyes from her, an' out it come.

"'Are ye like Blinky whin you takes yer clothes off?' says he. Miss Jannie, I couldn't move.

"'Who is Blinky?' says she very sharp, an' I couldn't get me hands on him in time. 'It's Mrs. Mahoney's pig,' says he!

"It's jest nadeless to tell ye, Miss Jannie, that that washin' niver come on Monday."

"Poor Lizzie!" said Janet, laughing until she choked with coughing, "but just the same I believe you love Denis a little better than the others."

"Well, ye see, it's jest his inquirin' mind. He's what ye call a genius," said Lizzie, "that's it," but she watched Janet anxiously as she struggled for breath. "I wish ye would get through wid that cold, me darlin'."

"How can any one get well of anything in such weather?" retorted the girl in a tone of irritation that Lizzie had never heard from her before. "It makes one feel like fainting all day long, and at night it's worse yet. It was ninety-two in my room at midnight last night; the bed was like fire and I coughed every other minute. It's just July, and two more months of it!"

"You're sick," said Lizzie. "I've known it for weeks, me Lady-Bird, an' instid iv takin' thim three childher to th' park, it's in yer bed ye ought to be."

"And burning up," answered Janet, lightly. "I prefer to move about."

"Have ye looked in th' glass, an' seen how thin ye be?" urged Lizzie.

"Yes, I'm growing as light as a fairy. Denis will never accuse me of looking like Blinky."

"Can't ye go away a while where it's cooler?" Lizzie persisted. "Go wid yer mither, darlin'—it's none too well she's lookin' hersilf."

"Lizzie, you don't think mother is worse?" The girl's light manner was gone in an instant.

"No, no," said Lizzie, quickly. "She looks a way better thin ye do this minute, but th' heat tires her, an' fer ye it's fair murther."

"There's no way I can go," Janet replied, wearily, her eyes on the floor. "It's out of the question."

Lizzie looked at her in puzzled sympathy. From

the first Janet's change of fortune had appeared to Lizzie to bring her no real joy. What was the good of their coming upon some of Mr. Carew's money if her darling was going to wear a face like that? During the first weeks she had seen Janet rarely. There was the baby, and their change to other and so much better quarters; Patrick's increased wages and the comfort of their neat little house—all had taken Lizzie's attention, but of late she had had time and opportunity to think of the girl, and she felt very anxious. Eyes less keen than hers could readily see that Janet was not happy, and ill as well. Lizzie wondered in vain why.

After the warm weather came Janet was often with her. The girl had taken a great interest in some of the more unfortunate people in the neighborhood in which they used to live, and Lizzie frequently went with her to visit them. The woman would listen amazed at the simple understanding the girl seemed to have of their wants. She had money with her to help them, but Lizzie used to think as she listened to some woman pouring out her dreary story to Janet, that it was much more the look in her face that drew them. They were not stories for a girl, many of them, and Lizzie thoroughly disapproved. If her pet had money and was among friends, why wasn't she enjoying herself like other girls of her age? "She's had it hard so long she can't take her mind from it,"

she explained to herself, but she was not satisfied. She had never asked about Janet's position, or about the lady whose companion she was, for the girl had been so reticent; it was Mrs. Carew who had told her all she knew, and Lizzie had concluded finally that the trouble lay there.

She was very shy of questioning her betters, but it would out. "Are ye unhappy where ye are, me pretty one?" she asked, gently. "Wisha now, can't ye tell the wan that loves ye as well as her own? It's lonesome ye are, thin?"

The slowly rising color dyed Janet's face and neck crimson, but she answered steadily enough: "Everybody's kind to me, Lizzie dear, but I don't feel well often. . . . Think of mother so pleased, and Paul walking about and every one with plenty to eat and drink!" Janet smiled at her, her color fading. There was no use to ask, and Lizzie turned to another subject.

"I niver in me life heard th' loike iv Misther Paul," she said. "Ye could have turned me over wid a straw, whin ye telled me he'd walked by himsilf out iv th' hospital! Does he loike it out west, thin?"

Janet shook her head doubtfully. "He fought against going," she said, "but they persuaded him, and they would only give him money if he went. We'll just have to hope he will like it."

"It's back he'll be if he don't," returned Lizzie. She had no opinion of Paul.

"There won't be anything given him to come back with, until they see how he gets along. There's nothing to do but just wait and hope with Paul. It's mother that's happiest about him, and we must never trouble her with any doubts," Janet sighed. "But, Lizzie, let's not talk about it. Give me my baby again —come,—the children will be back in a moment and we will have to go. Lizzie, I think she is going to be even prettier than Mary."

"An' why for did I give her yer name thin? If it had been a boy, I'd have called him Jammie, an' expicted him to be a pretty wan too, an' as good. Ye niver saw inything like it—she jest smiles all day long, an' is as quiet as quiet. I doubt she'd be here but for ye, Miss Jannie," and the woman's voice shook a little. "If ye would only get pink cheeks, an' smile different at me out iv yer eyes, I'm thinkin' th' wurruld wouldn't hould me for joy."

"Well, we'll see," said Janet. "I will take off my hat in the park and get burnt scarlet."

"Don't ye be so foolish now!" exclaimed Lizzie. "Ye'll jest be givin' yersilf a sthroke."

"Mary an' Patty's here!" shouted Denis, plunging in, and there followed the usual hubbub, to which little Larry, waking from his nap, lent his lusty voice.

It was one of her few pleasures, these rides she took the children, and the most congenial thing she found to do in the daylight hours that she crowded

as full as they would hold. Janet had found that to be busy every moment was a good way to stop thinking, at least about things you would rather not think of, and daily she preferred the heat and a hurry from one thing to another, to the hammock and meditation. Her mother took her mornings and a dozen other things the afternoons, and Denison saw far more of her than Dinah those days. In the late afternoons when she began to climb the familiar flight of stairs, it seemed to her that she could never reach the top, still less prepare for the evening, she was so tired.

Varek had noticed a great change in her since old Hedrick's death. She had given him almost no particulars, but it had evidently made a very deep impression on her, and Varek constantly wondered why it could have worked so marked a change. She had declared that she must have occupation, and she had spoken to him of herself and her position more plainly than she had ever done before; she was far more natural and showed a real interest in the things that occupied his attention, often astonishing him by the clearness of her insight. He brought her armfuls of books and magazines, and in their talks over them he was surprised anew at her familiarity with good literature; it was a knowledge gained from a childhood spent in a library, and far exceeded his own. Many of her references were Greek to him, but he hastened to repair his ignorance. He began to see

her in a different guise, but one no less lovable. It was as if she were timidly offering him her companionship, and Varek seized it eagerly, as he did anything that might bring them nearer to each other. Guardedly at first, then more openly, she gave him glimpses into a nature so sweet and womanly that it rebuked by very contrast his own ugly selfishness.

He began to have a vague understanding of her patient endeavor to place their relation on a higher footing, an appeal to his intelligence, that was silent but effective. To his surprised eyes there were opening vistas that he had never dreamed existed, and possibilities that marked entirely new departures for him. He clung tenaciously to the ideals that had always guided him, his faith in them had been absolute, but Varek in his own mind made a tremendous concession when he granted that such a thing as another standpoint existed for him. There was growing in him the possibility of placing the interests of another before his own, and he watched Janet's thin cheek and weary eyes with an anxiety that was growing into a positive torment.

Janet had directed Denison that afternoon to the quietest part of the park and here they got out, Denison seeking a shady spot in the road for his horses and himself. She found a convenient tree, and sat leaning against it, while the children roamed about,

bringing their treasures back to her. There were few wild flowers except daisies, and Janet suggested that they make wreaths. Denis declined occupation, but watched the others very contentedly. "Miss Jannie'll make mine, won't ye, Miss Jannie?" he said, rubbing his red head against her arm.

"Wish't I could find a bird's nest," said Patty. "I wish it had six eggs in it. Miss Jannie, did you ever see a hummin' bird's nest?"

"Yes," said Janet, in happy recollection. "They're dear little things, Patty. There was one in the big locust tree at home; the eggs are wee bits of white things."

"Does the hummin' birds sit on them?" asked Denis.

"Why, of course," said Janet. "How would they hatch if they didn't?"

"If hummin' birds sat on chicken's eggs would they hatch?" he asked. Patty gave a snort, but Mary, the practical, said, "Hummin' birds is little; they're littler than jest one chicken's egg. Ain't they now?"

"A good deal," said Janet.

"But, Miss Jannie," Denis persisted earnestly, "if I sitted on hummin' bird's eggs, wouldn't they hatch either?"

Patty and Mary both laughed, and Denis's long upper lip lengthened perceptibly, but Janet put her

arm around him. "Why do you want to know, Dennie?" she asked. Denis only sighed, and Patty snickered, teasingly, but Mary enlightened her.

"Dinis wanted to hatch chickens," she explained. "Mrs. Mahoney, she has lots an' lots, an' he ast mither, an' ast her for eggs, an' she didn't have none. Thin Mrs. Mahoney gived him ten—I seen her over the fence, but they was ones the hens had sitted on an' they wouldn't hatch for the hens. But Mrs. Mahoney, she telled Dinis if he ud cover thim up warm, maybe they'd hatch." Patty, and Denis in particular, were listening with grave interest to the narrative.

"Thin Dinis wint off, and mither thinked that he had rinned away, an' faither comed too, an' we called, an' called, and thin faither wint into the shed, an' in the corner Dinis sitted as quiet as quiet. And thin faither made him get up, an' he was jest sittin' on the eggs hisself, an'——"

"An' they didn't hatch," Denis interrupted, gravely. "They jest breaked."

"They done busted on him," said the exact Mary, with a disapproving look, "ivery one of thim did."

Patty wriggled with delight. "An' oh, Miss Jannie, but he smelled somethin' awful!" said she, "an' mither undressed him in the yard, and hanged out his clothes, but it stinked, iverything did, all around!"

Denis's eyes, nose and mouth took on the uncertain look that preceded a convulsion, but Janet hugged him

up close, laughing and kissing him at the same time, and Denis changed his mind and spoke. "I only wanted some little chickies," he said.

"Of course you did, sweetheart," said Janet, "and you shall have some all for your own."

"Little ones, Miss Jannie?" Denis's upturned nose wrinkled in joy.

Janet had a vision of Lizzie's face should a brood of helpless chicks be imposed upon her. "A little rooster, Dennie," she said, "and two little hens so high, and they will run and cackle."

Denis studied her doubtfully a moment, for he was a very persistent person, but then a light broke upon him, "Would they lay eggs?" he asked.

"Yes," said Janet, "lots of them."

"Would they hatch them into little chickies, Miss Jannie?"

"Of course they would."

Denis leaned his head back contentedly against her arm. "You can bring thim to-night thin," he announced.

This proved an interesting topic of conversation, and Janet's knowledge of bantams was tested to the utmost, but the slanting sunlight warned them that there was a long ride homeward, and collecting their wreaths, they made for the road and Denison. They climbed up a bank and down again, and stood on the edge of the road waiting for the carriage, which was

some distance away. In the other direction the road turned sharply, and almost without warning a motor slipped round the curve and passed them. Not before Janet had seen the occupant, however, and he had recognized her. It was Ehrenstein in all the glory of the most up to date motoring costume. The stop and wheeling curve that he executed, not without anxiety to himself, was masterly, and he landed so near the group that the children retreated up the bank in affright. From this vantage ground they gazed in awe-struck delight at the panting monster. Janet would most gladly have been somewhere else, but as it was she returned Ehrenstein's greeting pleasantly.

"Say, but you're a stranger!" he said, shaking hands with her. "You've been scarce. Why, I've looked everywhere for you."

"Have you? You are looking well, Mr. Ehrenstein."

"Bet I'm well! But you'd better go to the seashore yourself. I never saw you look so bad. Say, I don't mean you're not just as pretty, though," he added, gallantly.

"Thank you," said Janet, at a loss how to get rid of him. Denison, having had no intimation from his mistress to approach nearer, stopped again at a discreet distance, and slowly turned, walking his horses away. Janet did not wish to have Ehrenstein con-

nect her with the carriage, and perhaps Denison knew it.

Ehrenstein himself had been doing some thinking. Their office, as well as Bronson's, had heard, and they could not have told just how the report had originated, that Janet's family had come into some money. There was just enough of Janet's history and her father's misfortunes related to give the story perfect probability and though Ehrenstein had been somewhat skeptical, he had no knowledge whatever. He thought as he looked at her now that she was every inch a lady in her stylish linen gown and simple hat.

But Ehrenstein was never at a loss for words. "I've wanted to congratulate you," he said. "We've all heard you'd been lucky. A little spondulicks comes in handy, don't it? But say though, Miss Carew, you ought to be in the office now! If things ain't humming! Varek's a Jim dandy. Even Braun and me are cleaning up a bit, but Varek's out of sight. I guess, though, you see him sometimes, don't you? So I'm not telling you news." Ehrenstein had a conviction of Varek's fondness for the girl, though in the clear light of her eyes he ceased to harbor his previous suspicion; somehow the thought of evil and Janet did not go well together. Ehrenstein's look was more complimentary than curious, but Janet bore it with equanimity.

"How is Mr. Braun?" she asked.

Ehrenstein chuckled, and his hands came up. "He's a little under the weather just now," said he. "You see Miss Gladys Hammersmith turned him down. She's that swell society girl that's had fifteen offers this winter, one for every million her papa has. Braun told me all about it. It occurred in the conservatory, with the music floating by, and Miss Gladys was wearing one of his roses in her glorious hair. So Braun got stirred up and popped the question, and Miss Hammersmith cast down her eyes, and said she was too young to marry and couldn't think of it at all, and Braun's heart would have been completely broke, only there were the fourteen others and they were all the swellest dudes. But he says he's not going to think of marrying for a long time."

Janet laughed, but she must go. "You are losing your ride," she reminded him, "and I must go on too."

But Ehrenstein was not to be disposed of so easily. "Say, Miss Carew, can you keep a secret?" he inquired.

"I think so," answered Janet, making up her mind just to walk off after the carriage.

"Well then, I am engaged myself."

"Are you? I am so glad, and I hope you will be very happy." She said it truthfully, for much as he irritated her, he had really been kind. The sight of him brought back much that was painful, and the

disgusted sense of shame, and the concealment of it, that she carried about with her sickened her anew.

"Lemme show you her picture," Ehrenstein was saying. He dived into an inner pocket. "There, ain't she a daisy?"

The young lady presented some six inches of black pompadour and a pair of boldly challenging black eyes. Her wide smile brought her nose down in a suggestive curve, that left little doubt of Mr. Ehrenstein's having chosen among his own people. She was handsome after her fashion, and Janet did not hesitate to say so.

Ehrenstein put the face of his love back against his bosom with a satisfied air. "It's Miss Schmidt," he said. "You know the big wholesale haberdashers? Her papa's worth a fifty cents or two, and she's the only kid. I got that little beauty to run her round in, and I've named her Judy after my girl. Say, Miss Janet, you get in and have a ride with me—come on! She flies like a bird!"

Then Janet had an inspiration. "Oh, Mr. Ehrenstein, I think it is a beauty," she said. "I wouldn't go in it for worlds, I am afraid, but I should so like to see it go; where do you turn it on?"

Ehrenstein's face was good to see. "Beauty!" he said, expanding, "you bet your life! Why there isn't anything like her going. She'll beat any other runabout in town, and she ain't cost me a dollar in

repairs, but I begun right. I chucked out their old carburettor, and put in the best thing on the market, and I did the same thing with her commutator. I've bought every kind of spark-plug that's made,—and they cost like the deuce—but the ones she has now are daisies. Just get in her a minute, and we'll give her a try!" Ehrenstein had Janet's elbow, but she declined firmly.

"I can't possibly," she said. "I cannot leave the children. But I am anxious to see you start off; you sailed up so gracefully. She's hard to start, I suppose?"

Ehrenstein snorted in scorn. "Hard!" he said. "Just a touch! One turn does it."

"Where is it? In front here where this thing hangs down?"

"Yes, wait till I fix the clutch." Janet retreated, holding the fascinated Denis by the hand, and the other two took refuge behind her, mouths and eyes open. "Now," said Mr. Ehrenstein, bending and bracing himself for the light "touch." He brought the crank around with much energy, but Judy gave a profound sigh and stood still. Ehrenstein gave another touch or two, and grew red in the face. It was not an afternoon for exertion. "Those plugs," he muttered, and off came two lids, and Ehrenstein poked at the lady's insides. Then back went the lids, and he "touched" twice again with the same result.

Then he took off his cap and coat, and crawling upon his belly, like Nebuchadnezzar of old, he inspected his beauty from below. He rose again, the worse for dust and perspiration, and rubbed his head, murmuring "damn" several times. Then he lifted his coat abstractedly, and something bright dropped from it to his shoe, and into the dust. Ehrenstein turned a deeper crimson if possible as he picked it up, and as he inserted it into its socket, his eyes furtively sought Janet's—but she stood wrapped in ignorance.

Then Ehrenstein got to work. His coat and cap went on, and he gave one mighty turn, and Judy responded instantly. "Say," he shouted in Janet's ear, "I'll just go round the circle to see she's all right, and I'll be back in five minutes. We'll make the kids sit on the floor; she'll carry anything," and he was off. But ten minutes later when he returned there was nothing in sight but the back of a smart-looking coupé, and Ehrenstein soothed his feelings of hurt surprise by reflecting that he might have looked foolish toting three kids about.

VII.

A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

It was later than usual that evening when Janet climbed the flight of steps, and she felt hurried, but notwithstanding that she was forced to stop several times and rest. When finally she reached the top she stood panting, her hand to her side. "I shall not be able to do that much longer," she thought, looking down by the way she had come. "It gets harder every day." She turned, and to her surprise Varek was by her side. He had not come the day before, but even then it was very early for him, and she wondered, but was too breathless to ask. It struck her that he was pale, and that the hard lines of his face showed more plainly than usual. He looked at her drawn face without speaking, but he put his arm around her and helped her in. Then lifting her he carried her up-stairs to their room.

She had her breath by that time and laughed a little. "What a convenient way to get about," she said. "You lift me around as if I were a sack."

If she had hoped to soften his set look, she was disappointed, for the glance he gave her, though a loving one, did not stir his gravity.

"You lie still, Peggy," he said. "I am going

after Dinah to put you into something comfortable. I'll tell her to bring your supper up to the porch. You can eat it lying down if you want to."

"But how about yours?" she asked, anxiously. His manner worried her.

"I've had it, dear, all I want. I'm not hungry."

Varek not hungry? Janet felt that something must have happened. Dinah helped her into a white, lace-frilled wrapper, and let down her heavy hair. It fell a foot below her waist, and it was delicious to have the hot mass removed from her head. Dinah brushed and talked, but Janet did not hear her, and only asked when Varek had come.

"Mr. Leo?—He done ben here a hour," said Dinah.

Janet wondered still more, and suddenly a thought born of her constant anxiety flashed into her mind. She was away from Dinah's hand and out on the porch in an instant. Varek was standing, his hands in his pockets, looking out over the river, and he turned with a start when she gripped his arm.

"Leo," she said, with blanched lips, "it's not mother, tell me it's not!"—then relieved by his amazed look,—"or Paul?"

"You poor child, you," said Varek in his deep voice, "no, certainly not!" He took her into his arms and held her. "Why, Peggy, did I look as bad as all that?"

"I knew it was something," she said, breathing her relief, "and I thought of that first."

"Of course," said Varek, with some sarcasm, "but it's nothing of the kind. You go into the hammock now—I just have a bad attack of the blues—my tender sensibilities have been wounded. It's staggering to suddenly come up against one's duplicate, and recognize the qualities; the light it throws on one's own actions is something astonishing." He spoke in the enigmatic manner that Janet disliked most, his eye cold and his lip lifted. It used to frighten her, but she had learned to know him better and understood that it proceeded from strong emotion of some sort. It marked the change in their relations that she did not fear now to question him as to his moods, and Varek, who had never confided in any one, found a real pleasure in revealing himself.

She asked no questions, however, until they were settled for the evening. Varek had arranged a screen at her back, and in spite of the heat he made her put something around her. "I hate that cough," he said between his teeth. He had drawn a chair close beside her hammock, his hand touching hers, and again he said, "I hate this heat." He said nothing more, however, and presently Janet asked, "Is it money, Leo?"

"No, it's not that sum of all evil, Peggy. It's a huge disgust and you."

"I am sorry I come in," she said.

"Not in the disgust," said Varek. "That's entirely for myself and circumstances that have no connection with you at all. I can't tell you about it. But, Peggy, my own little girl, what am I going to do for you and myself?"

"What do you mean, Leo?"

"I mean I can't go on any longer, and watch your face change. It's killing you, this way of living."

"If you think I ought to keep more quiet, I will, only I have felt better doing things, than just lying around."

"It's aside from the question," he said with the huskiness that feeling always gave his voice. "You are unhappy, and you're ill. I have watched you for weeks. I didn't understand anything about it at first, or back there in the office, how it would affect you. I could not see why you shouldn't be happy, at any rate in time, and I wanted you terribly—I hoped that I could make you forget all that, and love me a little." Janet was silent and his hand closed on hers. "I have been thinking this out for some time, and the more I have loved you, the better I have understood. I was a fool to judge you by anything I've known. You are not that kind of clay, and you will never forgive me my mistake."

"I have understood how little of a wrong it appeared to you," she said very low. "I have always known that."

He drew a deep breath. "I thank you for granting me that much," he said, "and, Peggy, I want to ask you one question—I must think out a way for ourselves, and I know you will tell me the truth. Don't you ever think of me as your husband? I mean, do you never feel as I do, that there is a bond between us that would make the thought of the same relation with another an unfaithfulness; that save for a mere form we are husband and wife?"

Janet was silent, considering what he had said, then she answered from her conviction. "I think that you are Mrs. Varek's husband, and the fact that we have made relations of our own, cannot change the facts, or make wrong right. I am hidden away, and I am ashamed; is there no reason for those things? I would not go to another, for I would not only be doing a still greater wrong, but it would be too vile. I am unhappy because I am daily doing a thing I feel is wrong, and yet I continue in it; I see no alternative. I am what I have made myself, and I can do with the rest of my life only just the best that I can. You pressed me hard, Leo, but I have never forgotten that I yielded. You cannot call such things anything else than what they are, and they disgust and sicken me. I am hurting you and I am sorry, but if for mother's sake I have been untruthful to some, I never have been to you and I never will be."

Varek sprang up with a muttered imprecation

and walked rapidly up and down. "It all comes back to the same point," he said bitterly. "If you loved me these feelings would fade away in a night. Peggy, you make it hard for me and hard for yourself—and I *cannot* give you up. No, I *will not!* You—you don't know what it's like. *Good God!*" he stopped, staring into the darkness below, "that's where you're a child—you can't understand. But I'll not give you up—I simply *can't.*"

"I have not asked you to," she said in her soft voice. She had drawn herself up into a sitting position. "Leo, please come here. You are only going over exactly the same ground that we did six months ago."

Varek came and stood over her, his face convulsed. "Yes," he said, hoarsely, "and you stand just where you did then, but I, where am I? I tell you I'm in hell—in hell——" His voice rose and broke. "I can't even think or be the same man I was! I see you going before my eyes. You can't live like this, and I *cannot* give you back your freedom—I swear to you I would, if I could!" He had clutched her shoulder, but she reached up and loosened his fingers, and drew him down beside her.

"Hush, dear," she said, "I know it. I have learned that much during these months." It was the first time she had used a caressing word to him, and Varek choked over it and held her like one drowning.

But she went on soothingly, "I tell you what I think about my being tired all the time. I really, naturally, am very strong, but it has been almost two years of strain. Before poor father died, then with just mother and Paul and the dreadful anxiety, and these last months of such a different life—no one could go through it without breaking down. If you could find a way for me to rest for a while, just somewhere where it is cool—with mother—I think I should be well again."

"I know, I know," he said, irritably. "I had it arranged, and I meant to tell you that and something else, but I got off the track, and you gave it to me straight in the face—just give me time, Peggy, and I'll get myself together." He got up and went to the railing, and stood looking into the blackness. It was a particularly dark night and very still. Every now and then there were faint flashes of heat lightning. A storm might break before morning, but now it was fearfully close.

Varek came back presently and sat down, and his face looked tired and drawn as did Janet's. "Think of my letting myself go like that," he said in disgust, "and you ill. Where's my nerve I used to be so proud of? Now, Peggy, I am going to say what I have to say as quickly as possible. I want to take you and your mother down to the mountains—in North Carolina. They say it's the best place for your

mother, for it's not too cold. There's a family I know there who will take you both, and Mrs. Estiss will be competent to care for your mother. It's an absolutely secluded place, and the scenery is beautiful. Peggy, for my sake get well there!"

"But you, Leo?"

"I'll try and exist here—I have enough to do, God knows. Are you pleased, sweetheart?"

"I shall like the coolness and the change," she said.

Varek laughed harshly at her guarded answer, the muscles of his face twitching in a grimace. Then his whole manner changed and he bent over her, resting his hand on the cushion at her back. "Peggy," he said, "I'll make a bargain with you—I'll take you down there and settle you, and I'll only ask for a couple of days for myself; I'll try from now till then to collect strength to leave you, and I swear I will not see you again, unless you send for me or come to me, until I can marry you."

Janet drew her breath sharply, and Varek continued, "You don't understand, dear, but I shall be free before winter, and you will not refuse me that?"

It was so still for a time that the chirp of a cricket in some corner of the porch was startling, and then Janet said very low, "I cannot do such a thing. It would be at her expense, and what real difference would it be to me?"

"You are wrong there," said Varek, "and I am telling you the truth. She wants to marry the man she has always cared for and I am making it easy for her in more ways than one. That matter was settled long ago, not two weeks after I brought you up here. Do you think I was long in deciding who it was I wanted for my wife before the world as well as in my own heart? Peggy, I beg you to have compassion on me—I love you so, it must cover some mistakes. Does our relation mean no obligation at all to you, or is there any other who has a better right to you?"

"Leo, I don't love you—you know it; do you want an unloving wife? That is something I can't control."

"If you have your home and your children, and the life you deserve, there would be love enough, and you would try to spare me a little. Even if you gave me nothing in return, you would be mine to love just the same."

"A man in your position should have a wife who has an untarnished name. Mine—you know how a woman is judged."

"There is no one who knows, and if I were not sure of guarding you from anything of that kind, I would not ask you. I know my world better than you do."

Janet was silent. "Peggy, you shall have your mother with you as long as she lives, and I will help

you to make a man of Paul. Put your hand in mine—please—it's where it belongs. My—own—little girl!"

Janet had raised her hand uncertainly, and his had closed on it. "So," said he, huskily, "and how am I going to thank you, or tell you how proud I am——" and he lifted his shoulders, and threw back his head. "What do I care for my forebears now! I bet I can make *my* son proud of me. A man makes himself I say!"

BOOK III.

I.

HORSESHOE VALLEY

THE mid-afternoon sun fell hot on the flowered terrace, bending the necks of the brilliant petunias and poppies. Even the stiff marigolds looked crest-fallen, meekly awaiting the light, cool breeze that had already begun to stir the upper branches of the oaks, beeches, and chestnuts on the steep slope above. It lifted and turned the leaves on the trees on the hill-sides, and waved the tasseled heads in the corn patch in the valley below. The not unpleasant heat of mid-day was over and they would have that cool, sweet breeze for hours.

The far-sighted eyes of the woman who sat beside the house in the shade of the huge oak, watched its approach up the valley. The natural ledge on which the long rambling house stood was well up a wooded slope that formed the apex of a horseshoe curve of hills. Directly below, the valley lay, not a half-mile wide, and but little more in length, narrowing at its lower end into a gorge of rocky, perpendicular sides. From where the woman sat she could look directly through it, as one might through one's rounded hand, and catch a glimpse of open country merging in the far distance into the blue mist of the

mountain range. The scene was exquisite in its green beauty, and there was perfect quiet, save for the fall and gurgle of the mountain stream that tumbled over its rocky bed not a hundred feet away. Its course was bitten deep into the hillside, and in the winter its voice rose to a roar. On reaching the valley it moved more quietly, slipping along between its banks of tangled willow and elderberry. It went peacefully in summer, running deeply in winter, past the clapboard barn and log cabin, that were the only habitations of the little valley.

The woman who looked and enjoyed was dressed in the uniform of a trained nurse, and her quiet deeply lined face turned now and then toward the long invalid chair a few feet from her. She noted with a practised eye the absolute repose of the sleeping form. It was in sleep that Mrs. Carew showed her weakness most. When awake her quick vivacity seemed to imply a latent strength, but her experienced nurse knew better than any one how slender a hold she had on life, and how slight a shock or change would bring a lasting quiet.

She had cared for Mrs. Carew during those six months at the sanitarium and the blind woman had come to look to her for everything. The gray, beetle-browed physician whom Varek had chosen out of all the eminent of the city to watch over Mrs. Carew, had expressed his satisfaction at Varek's plan of

change. "Good," he said, "it could not be better. With her it's only a matter of time longer or shorter, and doctors can't help her. As for her daughter it's not tonic she needs—just turn her loose in the woods. Let Mrs. Estiss go with them, and the sooner the better."

Varek had given a good deal of thought to the choice of a place for them, and had finally hit upon Horseshoe Valley. He had gone once with a party of railroad men to Asheville, and while there had met the lazy Charlestonian who had amused him with a drawling description of his home in the Carolina mountains. He called himself "Cun'el Carson," and hospitably urged Varek to visit him and go trout fishing, but he had had no time to spend that way. Varek learned that his acquaintance really had the picturesque home he described and that the old gentleman was in the habit of eking out his slender income by a winter boarder or two. "Our summers cert'ly are quiet, suh," he explained, "but we gen'ly have friends with us durin' the wintah." He was fond of hunting, and the stories he told of deer-stalking and moonshiners greatly interested Varek's crowd, but it was on trout fishing that he waxed eloquent. Varek had gathered that Mrs. Carson was practical and a good cook, a rarity in that region, and his later inquiries had satisfied him that Mrs. Carew and Janet would be comfortable.

Varek had come with them and installed them in their rather bare but pleasant rooms, and looked the ground over carefully. There was not a place where any one could stay, short of the town seven miles away. Gainsville was a rambling collection of shacks, a store or two, and the post office. It lay in a beautiful cup in the hills and the large hotel that was building on one of the slopes held promise for the future, but at present there was not a stranger's face in the region.

Varek had also asked some questions that the Colonel had answered satisfactorily. "Young men, suh!" he had exclaimed. "We don't have them, suh. The country about here produces a few boys, and a right smart number of girls, but the boys grow to men somewheres else. They get out as soon as they can, exceptin' one or tew that wouldn't never be anything else but boys. There's Stubby Fisher, I reckon he might be twenty-three, an' there are one or tew over to Gainsville, includin' Dr. Brown, but that's all!" Varek inspected the young men the Colonel mentioned, particularly the round-faced, bow-legged Dr. Brown, and felt quite satisfied. Janet could not contain her joy at the beauty about her, and whatever other thoughts Varek carried away with him, he felt he had chosen wisely for her.

The coolness began to be perceptible now, and Mrs. Estiss moved softly to lay a shawl over her

patient's shoulders, but Mrs. Carew spoke. "I am awake," she said. "Has Janet come back?"

"She is coming," replied Mrs. Estiss. "I saw her some time ago down in the field below. Would you like to walk a little?"

"Perhaps we could go a short way to meet her."

Mrs. Estiss helped her up and the two went slowly down the road that passed below the terrace. It led zigzagging down the hillside until it reached the valley, where it followed the course of the stream and out through the gorge.

They stopped beneath the terrace, for Janet was sure to come that way, and presently she appeared on the road below. Looking up she saw them, and her voice came up clearly, "Here I am, mother."

She did not take the longer way round by the road, but came by the little, winding path that led up the steep slope, and she was soon laughing and panting beside them. "Oh," she said, "that does make one's knees ache! Have you had your nap, mother?"

"Yes, dear, and what have you been doing all afternoon?"

"Making hay," said the girl brightly. "My hair is full of seeds, and so are my shoes. It was such fun listening to their talk."

The three had turned and were walking back to the house. Janet went with her hand on her mother's arm and even after her climb her step was light. Mrs.

Estiss smiled as her eyes rested on her. The sun had given her clear skin a warm tinge, not deep enough to be red, nor brown enough for tan, and her full lips were scarlet. As she walked, half smiling, her eyes downcast, and her long lashes almost against her cheek, the woman thought she had never seen anything more lovely. She had a very plain woman's delight in beauty, and she never tired of watching the girl.

"Where is your hat?" she asked.

Janet put her hand to her tumbled hair. "Oh, dear," she said, "I must have left it down there. Never mind, I don't wear it anyhow."

Mrs. Carew had been silent, for any exertion made her very short of breath, but now she said, "I wish you would wear it, Jannie; you will get freckled."

"I am not though," said Janet. "Am I, Mrs. Estiss?"

"Not yet," said the woman in her prim way, "but I wouldn't feel too sure of myself. Now, Mrs. Carew, we will fix you on the porch." They found a sheltered corner, and brought Mrs. Carew's chair. Janet drew up a bit of matting and sat on the floor at her mother's side. "Has the Colonel come back yet?" she asked.

"Mrs. Carson says he won't get back before night," Mrs. Estiss replied. "She thinks he must have found some one to go with him or he wouldn't

stay so long. I dare say he loses count of time wading about those streams, but how he manages to go without talking all those hours, is what I can't see." She spoke with some acerbity, for the Colonel's drawling flow of language and careful avoidence of manual labor did not meet with her approval.

Janet laughed up at her, lowering her voice, "You wouldn't have him milk the cow would you?" Mrs. Estiss sniffed and relapsed into silence. It was rarely that she spoke at all, and Janet often thought that somewhere within she must have a world all her own to which she retreated, for apparently she took so little interest in those around her, that is, aside from her own particular patient; for her, she was all eyes, and ears, and hands. But Janet was not repelled by the woman's apparent coldness, as a girl of less correct perception might have been. In their joint care for Mrs. Carew the two had come to an understanding of each other and a consequent liking.

"I wish he would come back though," Janet persisted, "for I want to do something. I want him to take me over to Crooked Lake; Stubby Fisher has been telling me about it. Mummie, he says that all one side of the lake is a mass of water-lilies, and there is good fishing, sensible fishing—I mean, from a boat. It sounds like the lake we used to go to, mother, do you remember?"

Mrs. Carew sat up with animation. "Indeed I

do! Mrs. Estiss, we used to go in a big flat-bottomed boat, and row right into the lilies, Mr. Carew would, and then we would hold the children. They would just fill the boat and put lilies all over me." She lifted her shoulders, sighing, and dropped her hands. "It was beautiful!"

"You shall have a whole bushel of them to-morrow, mother."

"Was Mr. Stubby Fisher helping make hay too?" Mrs. Estiss inquired.

Janet laughed. "There were Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, and Stubby, and their way of making hay is easy. They cut it with a scythe and then sat around, and then they raked it up. Mr. Fisher was always stopping and talking, just leaning on his rake, and Mrs. Fisher always works with a stumpy pipe in her mouth. She's straight up and down, mother, like a man, and has thousands of wrinkles, and wears the same boots and hat as Mr. Fisher; the only difference is her skirt. Stubby raked up a pile for me to sit on and they all sat down and talked about the man who shot the darky in Gainsville. It is fun to hear them talk. Mr. Fisher said, 'Ye oughter go an' see the trial over to Summit; we-uns is all agoin'. They'll be gittin' the jury together, an' thet'll be a tol'able slow business. You-uns oughter go sure.' I wish I could really talk like them. Then Stubby said the courthouse would be full, that every one would go for miles

around, and they would begin by 'callin' ' the jury. He ''lowed' it would take a long time, and I asked why? He said it would be like this—every seat would be taken, and men standing against the walls all around the room. Then they would call one after the other, and most of them would 'qualify,' until it came to the last question, 'An' hev you-all paid you-all's taxes fer last year?' and they would say 'naw,' and have to go down, while everybody laughed. Stubby said that there might be a dozen in the whole room who could say 'I hev.' "

"But why don't they pay their taxes?" Mrs. Carew asked.

"Because they are so shiftless," said Janet. "I knew from the way Mr. Fisher chuckled that he had not paid his."

"I am glad it is all such fun to you, Jannie; you will not want to see St. Louis again," and Mrs. Carew touched her daughter's cheek lovingly. But Mrs. Estiss noticed that the light went out of the girl's face, and that she had nothing more to say.

A few weeks had made a marvellous change in her, but Mrs. Estiss was as observant as she was silent, and she had seen the old look of settled sadness return again, and again; a word, a reference, would call it back. The businesslike envelope with its type-written address, that formed a part of the daily mail, never failed to evoke it. It seemed to her that the girl

looked eagerly for diversion, a throwing herself as it were into the simple life about her with the desire to extract every bit of joy possible from it. She was up with the birds in the morning, losing nothing of the sunrise and early misty beauty. She tended Mrs. Carson's flower beds and wandered up and down the stream with the adventurous delight of a child. She persuaded the Colonel to take her on horse-back rides in all directions, and came back with pink cheeks to talk it all over with her mother. She made acquaintance with every human being that she came across, and collected the essence of the quiet, slow-going life about her. She would listen with humorous interest to the remarks of Stubby Fisher or his mother, or seek to draw out the half shy, half admiring mountain boy who sometimes drove them about, but in the quiet evenings when Mrs. Carew slept, and Mrs. Estiss slipped down to the porch, she would find the girl sitting with her chin in her hands, and her wide eyes looking into darkness or misty shadows, lost to those about her, and if the lines of her drooping body and her still face denoted happiness, it was of a different nature from any Mrs. Estiss had ever known.

The woman had understood perfectly what Varek had meant when he had almost doubled her salary with the remark that he wished frequent reports of the progress and daily interests of her patients. She smiled a little grimly each week when she fulfilled her

agreement. Her accounts of Mrs. Carew's condition and Janet's progress were full and exact, but she reflected that if Varek had imagined that she might fill the position of spy, he would meet with disappointment. She had no liking for the hard looking man. His cold abrupt manner carried her back to painful experiences in her own life. She did not guess the truth, but she saw plainly that Varek's interest in Janet was unusual and that it gave the girl anything but pleasure. She surmised that the two women were practically dependent on him, and it was not a position she would have enjoyed for herself.

Janet always spent the early evening with her mother. Mrs. Carew would go to bed almost directly after supper, and Janet would sit with her until she went to sleep; it was their hour together as it had been before their separation. That evening Mrs. Carew slept earlier than usual, and Janet sat on, watching the twilight grow into darkness. She was tired after her day's exertions, and her rocker was very comfortable. She decided that she would go to bed early, and hoped that the Colonel would come home before it was too late for her to speak to him, and it was with distinct satisfaction a little later on that she heard his "hello" from the bottom of the hill. She guessed that there would be a second supper preparing, so she waited, but presently Mrs. Estiss opened the door and beckoned her out.

"It's Stubby Fisher," she said. "He wants to see you."

"My hat, I suppose," said Janet. "Why doesn't he leave it?"

"I can't say," Mrs. Estiss replied. "He has planted himself on the lowest step out there, and he 'lowed' he wanted to see you."

"Well, mother's asleep, so I will go;" and she laughed a little. "Is he holding his bulldog as if he would let him fly at you if you became too bold? He's natural in the hay-field, but when he is making an evening call you feel in danger of your life,—so pray for me." She went on down the stairs, looking back and smiling, and the light on the floor above fell on her upturned face.

The steps were in shadow all the way down and Janet was not paying attention, so when she stepped on something bulky that turned under her foot, she fell headlong. She grasped in terror for the hand rail, but encountered instead a very solid body that caught her up and held her tightly. "Great Scott! Are you hurt?" a stranger's voice said in her ear. "That beastly bag of mine—I'm awfully sorry!"

Janet's heart had risen into her throat with fright, but she managed to gasp out, "No," and then, "They ought to have a light down here." Her first consciousness was of being glad that she had not screamed and startled her mother.

"Mrs. Carson carried it off," said the voice again. He lifted her the few remaining steps to the floor below, and asked anxiously, "You are sure you're not hurt?" Janet assured him she was not.

"I'll go for a light," said the man. "You might have been killed by that fall. It was lucky I was in the way."

In the dimness Janet made out his tall form, but she was shaken and embarrassed both, and she did not want a light. She drew away toward the door. "Please don't trouble," she said. "I am all right, and I am going out on the porch anyway—there's some one waiting out there. Thank you very much for—being in the way, though," and she caught her breath in a little laugh as she went out.

Stubby's long body lifted itself from the step to greet her, but she was only eager to sit down; she had been more frightened than she knew, and her knees felt uncertain under her. "I almost fell downstairs," she said.

"Ye didn't hurted yerself none, did ye?" he asked, anxiously. "I knowed he ketched ye, an' I 'lowed ye was safe."

"No, I am not hurt, but who was it kept me from falling? Did he come with the Colonel?"

"I reckon he did, but I ain't seen him," said Stubby. "I knowed his voice, though. He war hyar last year; him an' the Cun'el is mighty good friends."

"Do you think he will stay here, Mr. Fisher?" Janet asked anxiously. She glanced behind her as she spoke, but though the light had been brought into the hall there was no one there.

"I 'low I can't tell ye," said Stubby, rather sulkily. "I reckon you-uns would be glad ef he did now?"

"No," Janet said, truthfully, "I would not."

"Wouldn't ye, sure?" and Stubby's voice expressed satisfaction, but Janet was following out her own thoughts.

"If the Colonel has a friend he will be going off with him all the time, and won't take me riding. I want to go for some of those water-lilies to-morrow but now I suppose I can't." Her voice was full of disappointment. The boy strove for courage to offer himself in place of the Colonel, but the words would not come, and he gripped Tobe a little more tightly by the collar. "You-all sets a store by them lilies," was all he found to say.

"I haven't seen a water-lily for years," said the girl, longingly. "Why you don't know what it is like where I have been living. It's just cold, or wet, or both together, all winter, and hot, and sticky, and dusty all summer. Think of putting your face into an armful of cool water-lilies!"

Stubby looked at her, his long-lashed eyes glistening. "You-all wuz meant fer the mountings," he said with a slower drawl than usual. "I 'lowed ye wuz kin ter it all, the fust time I seen ye."

Janet caught his meaning and smiled at him out of the shadow. "I love it all," she said, lingeringly, "the beauty—and the quiet—and," her voice dropping, "the clean living."

"An' you-all hev ter go back to it, the dust an' thet?" The boy drew up his long body, a deeper note in his tones. A few years would give him the lanky form of the mountaineer, but he had youth in his favor now, and his lean brown face lighted by his somber eyes had its beauty, as did the long lines of his figure. The note of feeling forced itself even into Janet's self-absorption, and brought her back to reality.

"Yes, and I will have to practise hard to get some of your words in the meantime—we-uns and you-uns—they are so pretty, I think. I am going to say them after this." She spoke lightly.

Stubby twisted Tobe's collar again, but he went back to his usual lazy drawl—"I'll learn you-all a verse we-uns says down hyar, an' it's purtier fer bein' true. When you-all thinks of it up thar in the dust, ye'll remember Tobe an' me an' the mountings. Do you-all mind ef I say it tew yer?"

"No, I should like to hear it if it's pretty."

"We-uns says it when we-all's a-co'tin'. Et goes like this:

> 'Et's hard fer we-uns and you-uns ter part,
> Sence you-uns is stolen we-uns' heart.'

Dew you-all like et?"

"It is pretty," said Janet, caught by the music of his soft drawl. "Thank you for repeating it, and for bringing my hat too." She had risen and Stubby felt himself dismissed. He stood covered with confusion at his boldness of a few moments before, and doubtful if he had offended her. He jerked hard at the dog. "Tobe an' me must be goin'," was all he could say, and then he added shyly, "I 'low you-all will be tew tired to git up early temorrer?"

"Indeed, I shall be up before anybody else!" said Janet. "I always am."

II.

A SUNRISE GREETING

SOMETHING waked Janet earlier than usual the next morning, and she lay a while wondering if it were the coming day or the moon that made the gray light in her room. She had only to raise her head to determine; her window commanded a view of the valley and the gorge, and through it the strip of horizon above the distant mountain range. There was a warm pink glow there, the jagged line of mountain top a dark blue against it. It was morning and a coming sunrise, an earlier view than Janet had had yet.

She was not long in getting up and as she dressed she watched the sky. It took an hour for the sun to climb above the surrounding hill-tops and touch the flowers on the terrace, but in summer there was always the view of the first faint glow through the gorge, and the whole front of the house commanded it.

Janet moved softly, for she did not want to wake any one. She could count on two hours for herself before the household would be stirring. She put on a white woolen dress and selected a red tie for its warm color, for the mist lay thick in the valley, and its cold breath had crept up the hill-side.

It was lighter now, and the pink glow had spread

and shot higher into the sky; it turned the gray fog in the valley to a pale lavender, and the trees began to show green. Janet opened her door and stole out. The hallway was in darkness yet, and warned by her experience of the night before, she made use of the hand-rail. There was a crack of light around the front door, and it was ajar, which did not surprise her, the closing of doors and windows being an unimportant thing in that house; but with her hand on the knob she stood arrested. It came to her through the crack and filled the corner of the hall, a sweet, cool scent that she knew, and she pulled at the door in a flush of anticipation. There they were banked at her feet, armfuls of them; the night chill had half-closed the flowers, and the white petals were gathered up in their green sheaths, but they were her water-lilies. She was down over them in an instant with a low sound of delight. She gathered them up damp as they were and put her face into them, then sitting down on the floor, half in, half out of the door, she proceeded to enjoy them fully. There were so many she did not see how any one could have gathered them all in one night, and they were rather curiously divided into two groups, one tied with some endeavor at arrangement, and the other loose with plenty of big green leaves among them; both together, they made a pile that reached almost to her chin. Her hand sought among them and drew out a great long-

stemmed beauty, more widely open than the others, and with it at her lips she looked up and sat still with surprise.

Not six feet from her, carelessly seated on the porch-rail, one foot swinging, sat a young man, his gaze riveted on her. Her stare of utter amazement, merging gradually into recognition, met fairly the dancing light in his bright hazel eyes, and they looked at each other in perfect silence. Then Janet dropped her flower and passed her hand over her eyes, but he spoke.

"It is really I, Miss Carew, and you are really you—but you don't remember my name?"

"Yes, I do," said Janet vaguely, "but—but I don't understand about your being here." She became conscious of her undignified position on the floor and started to rise, and he sprang to help her. "Please don't look so startled," he said. "I am actually flesh and blood—you can feel me!"

They stood holding hands a moment over the lilies, and then Janet began to laugh softly, and he laughed with her. "It was you last night then, Mr. Carroll; I might have guessed—— But I have my wits now, though I am just as much surprised," and she drew her hand away.

"I have been sitting here a half hour or more, wondering if you would recognize me when you opened the door."

"How did you know I would get up early?" she asked.

His eyes twinkled. "I understood it was your custom."

"The Colonel told you that we were here then," said Janet. "Why didn't you introduce yourself last night instead of being so mysterious?" She had gone back to the half playful manner of their short acquaintance, and he answered her in turn.

"I didn't know a thing about it until I saw the light on your face last night; I might be pardoned for losing my head a bit afterwards. I stood there on the steps quite as surprised as you were this morning, and next I had too sharp a fright to think of anything else. Do you realize Miss Carew that it is nearly five years since we danced together that night?"

"More nearly twenty, I think," said the girl, sobering.

"Won't you sit down—here on the bench?" he asked. "We can see the sun rise while we talk."

"I ought to put those lilies in water," Janet was hesitating.

"They're wet," he objected; "it won't hurt them to stay a little longer, and the others will be about before long. Ah, look at that!" The dark sides of the gorge framed a perfect blaze of glorious light. Behind the purple ridge of mountain, there burned

a fiery furnace, turning the whole eastern sky into a glow of changing colors; rays of light shot up, touching the low-lying fleecy clouds with all the colors of the rainbow.

"Five minutes more!" he said almost in a whisper. "Miss Carew have you seen it before?"

"Never as wonderful as that," she answered, as low as he.

They watched in silence the wavering glow as it leaped flame-like, shooting up higher and higher, and suddenly out of the fiery depths appeared a rim of light so piercing that it blinded the eyes of the two watchers.

"Another day," said Carroll, turning to his companion and noting the quiet lines into which her face had settled. "Miss Carew, what have you been doing all these five years?"

They looked at each other and had their own thoughts. He was much the same, his eyes as she remembered them, full of pleasant light, but his clear cut features looked older. His fair hair with its undeniable tinge of red was cut close, but even then it could not hide a slight crisp wave. He was clean shaven, and his square jaw with its rather stubborn looking chin saved the face from any approach to mere beauty that the brow and eyes alone might have suggested. It was a nice face, clean and well tanned, and in keeping with his good height and broad shoul-

ders. There was the air of the trained athlete in his easy carriage, and Janet noticed it that morning as she had five years before, and it was attractive. She was a little doubtful and critical as well, but she decided she liked his face and that he was as she had remembered him.

It took him a shorter time to draw his conclusions and he smiled at her grave look. "Well?" he said.

Janet smiled back at him. "I was just seeing if you were changed. I have been so surprised that I haven't had time to notice."

"You are, very much—your whole expression; but you are more beautiful than you were." He spoke in simple conviction, and it did not occur to Janet to feel self-conscious.

"Do you know," he continued, "that I was at your old home not three weeks ago? Nobody could tell me a thing about you—I suppose I didn't see the right people."

"In Virginia! Did you really go to our house?"

"To your very doorstep."

"Oh, tell me how it looks—is it changed?" She had turned full on him, her eyes wide and her hands lifted in her usual gesture when moved. The sunburn in the young man's cheek deepened a trifle. "What a perfect little beauty!" he said to himself. "What eyes!—but her mouth is just as sweet as ever,

in spite of her looking so sad." He had heard something of Mr. Carew's disastrous career.

"You forget I had never been before," he said aloud, "but it all looked old enough, and beautiful enough."

"Was the honeysuckle by the porch, and the grape-vine?"

"Yes, both of them, and the locust-trees were in full bloom, and a whole tangle of Persian roses on the terrace." The young man was getting a rather intoxicating continuance of Janet's deep look, and would gladly have answered questions without end, but she turned away with a quiver of her chin.

"If I could only see it," she said. "Who owns it now?"

"Some one had just bought it, some stranger." The girl was keeping her face well turned from him, and Carroll searched in his mind for some subject that would make her look at him again, and he partially succeeded. "I talked to your old Mammy," said he.

"Mammy Wilda! Did she talk about me?"

"All of you, but you in particular," and determined not to lose her attention he plunged into a recital, Janet listening, her face changing from joy to sadness, or again to amusement, as he touched upon different recollections. "I went down there to hunt up some relatives and stay with them," he concluded.

"I had promised myself to, as soon as I could manage it. You knew I was a Virginian,—originally—didn't you?"

"I remember you told me—but why did you come away?"

"Because I was disappointed;" and he eyed her a moment as if to go on, and with almost any of the many girls he had known he would not have hesitated, curiosity as to how his remark might be received would have prompted him, but with her for some reason he found himself silent. "I had a longing for the mountains," he said. "Last year I was architect for a wealthy New York man who built a home here in the mountains, and I found this hidden place and the Colonel. I had a sudden wish to come and I came."

"Can you skip about the country wherever you want to go?" Janet just glanced at him from under her long lashes; he did not have the air of a worker.

"Can I!" he returned. "I should rather say not! I work like a slave most of the time. Of course you don't know, but father had bad luck not long after I met you, and it was only because mother was a regular general that we got on our feet again. I've put in pretty steady years these last four, I assure you." He spoke with a good deal of warmth, and Janet observed him demurely.

"I didn't mean to insult you," she said.

"Your tone was uncomplimentary. I deserve a few weeks' vacation out of two years, don't I?"

"I don't know—I thought you seemed so very able-bodied—but of course I am not a good judge."

He looked at her as one would at a tantalizing child, and then he laughed at her. "I had thought I would give myself two weeks more, but now I shall make it a month."

"Here?"

"Yes, in this house. I need more rest, and you need some one to supply you with water-lilies."

"Thank you," said the girl, lifting her chin. "I seem to be supplied."

"Would you be satisfied, Madam, with less than that number?" and he pointed to the mass on the floor.

"No, certainly not!"

"Well, which collection did you judge was mine?" —his eyes were dancing again.

"I don't know what you mean," answered Janet, with dignity.

"I suppose you observed that there were two separate piles; for which do you think I was responsible?" His look enlightened her more than his words, and she flushed pink.

"Do you mean, Mr. Dorsey Carroll, that you heard my remarks last night?"

"A few, Miss Carew—my bedroom window is directly over where you sat and I am not deaf."

"The lake is six miles away, and there is nothing but a leaky boat there, and it was dark." Janet's manner was gravely disapproving.

"I rode there. It was moonlight, and I was an hour ahead of Mr. Fisher," Dorsey chuckled. "I had my lilies safe on the horse, and covered, when he rode up, and I was quite as much surprised to see him as he was to see me, I think. 'Hev you-all ben fishin'?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said, 'and I hope you have as good luck,' and I left him."

Janet would not smile or look at him, and he went on, though not quite as assuredly. "You haven't answered my question yet, Miss Carew,—which bunch do you think is mine?"

She turned and studied them then, her brow slightly drawn. "The one tied with string," she said finally. "The other is so much more artistic."

He flushed scarlet in spite of himself, and the girl knew it, and it only gave a greater carelessness to her proposal. "They ought to go in water, don't you think so? Will you help me?"

The young man complied rather meekly, and helped her gather them up, but his dejection was not proof against time, for Mrs. Estiss, hearing laughing voices, looked out of her back window and saw a pretty sight. A very good-looking young man with his sleeves rolled well up on his muscular arms, was filling a tub with water, and Janet, her arms bare also, was

poking and twisting the long stems down into the water. She had stuck a lily in her hair, and her face was as bright as the morning.

It is difficult for youth to keep from laughter, if it is tempted by youthful joy in return, and it is easier to forget the past and live in the present, when one has not yet learned from frequent experience that it is the past and the present that go to make up the sum of the future. The two that had come together and touched hands, met and turned to each other as naturally as the pond-lily to the sun, or a bird to its mate, and that is as it should be. So at least thought Mrs. Estiss and the old Colonel as the sunny days passed, and there was a small conspiracy on foot among those who had in their time experienced, or longed for, a like happiness.

III.

TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

It was early, shortly after eight, when Varek entered his office. Barnes had been at work for an hour, arranging window-shades and electric fans, for a glance at the thermometer promised a record breaker. It was the "hot week" in September, and in spite of his loyalty a St. Louian will confess it "pretty bad."

Varek did not look very well. The fold in his brow had deepened in the last few months. It had been a trying summer as to weather, but Varek paid little heed to that; he had been desperately busy, and glad of it, for time would have dragged interminably if he had not been. He had known very well that it would be a bad time for him, but the reality far outstripped his conception of it. He was restless, lonely, foreboding, and thoroughly unhappy. He longed for her letters, like a terribly thirsty man for water, and when they came it was merely a drop on his hot tongue. They were a dutiful recital of her daily life, and she gave him descriptions of people and her surroundings that were well done, for she evidently enjoyed the things of which she wrote, but

Varek scanned them in vain for a single word that held the note he longed for. She often expressed a few words of friendship, and always a wish for his welfare, but that was all. For days he would succeed in writing calmly, and then would come the time when the barriers were down, and his words fairly burnt the paper. It was like dashing himself against a stone wall in hope of making a breach, and as futile. In his more collected moments he wondered at the strength of will that had kept him true to his promise; surely it deserved some reward.

"Any mail?" he asked that morning. It was his constant question, and Barnes thought that any man ought to be satisfied with the pile he daily laid before his employer.

Varek sorted them rapidly, but what he wanted was not there, and he turned with a deeper frown to one that he had tossed aside from the others. It bore the mark of a Colorado town, and he read it with no pleasant expression.

"Dear Varek," it said, "I am over here for supplies, so take the opportunity to send you a line. That cub you sent out here has cut the traces at last and made off. I have given you my opinion of him before, so won't repeat it. I'll only say that whatever he's fit for I don't know, but certainly it's not for ranching.

"He's been going it pretty hard lately, for there's

been a pretty tough gang over to Foster's, and they say he has won some. He's kept quiet about his intentions, so I can't tell you where he is, but when funds give out I suppose he'll turn up on your hands.

"I'm sorry, and I think you know that if Mamie and I could have done anything with him we would have. It's no good trying to make a cracked pot hold water, and his opening is pretty wide, I'm thinking. Hear you are making your everlasting pile, and I am glad of it. Things here are fair to middling, cattle looking up some. Mamie wants to be remembered—and I am as ever

Yours,

D. Briscoe."

"Bah!" said Varek, throwing the missive from him and going back to his grievance. "Why in hell doesn't she write to me! Four days and not a word. Come in!" he called savagely to Barnes's knock.

"Two telegrams, sir," said the man. "Shall he wait?" but Varek was reading, and at a glimpse of his face Barnes went out. He had never seen his employer look like that before. Varek read, half rising from his seat as he did so. It was rather a long message, and his look was as mystified as it was startled. He held it a moment in his hand, his quick brain working; then he started for the door, but recollecting the second envelope as a possible explanation he tore it open. It was brief enough and dated

the night before. "Will arrive to-morrow morning. You will find me at the house." It was signed Janet.

"Good God!—What does it mean?" he gasped. "She doesn't know—and is here!" and then it rushed over him, sweeping away every other thought for a moment. "She is here with me again, and she has come of her own accord——"

He jerked at his watch and saw the time, and catching up the telephone with a shaking hand, he called up his garage. "Send the machine round to the office at once," he ordered, hoarsely. "Tell Stebbins to make time, do you hear? I'm waiting!"

As he sped along the dusty streets, his thoughts traveled back and forth seeking a solution. Underneath it all, the main point to which he returned after conjecture and anxious questioning was the satisfaction of her actual presence. It was the foundation to build upon, and Varek gathered together his forces. He did not deceive himself; he felt there was a crisis at hand, though as yet he was in the dark, and he called upon a lifetime of quick thinking and accurate judgment to aid him.

Dinah rolled the whites of her eyes at his questioning look. "She am upstairs," she said, and he waited for no more; one look would tell him more than the black woman could.

For the sake of coolness, every blind in the room was drawn except at the window where Janet sat, but

that was open to the top, and Varek had a good view of her the moment he entered the door. She sat on a low seat, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, her eyes apparently on the river. She did not hear him and he stopped to observe her. He could catch only a bit of her profile, but the lines of her crouching figure expressed profound dejection. She looked as if she might have sat there for hours oblivious to surroundings, and though he was only a foot or two from her she did not stir. He did not wish to startle her too much by touching her, and he spoke her name softly. "Peggy."

She turned then slowly and looked up at him. Her face had a more rounded contour than when he had last seen her, but in the cruelly bright light that fell from the window she looked so ghastly as almost to be blue. There was a line from nose to chin such as one sees in a middle-aged woman who is suffering, and the dumbly hurt look of a wounded animal was in her blank gaze. Varek's heart contracted as he looked at her, and the flush of joy he had felt at the sight of her in their room again, ebbed away. What was it?

She dragged at a chair beside her and stood up, and her voice was low and lifeless. "Leo, I have come back to you." His throat hurt him, but he put his arms about her and held her close. "Yes, sweetheart," he whispered, "and I will help you, whatever it is."

She laid her head on his breast as if too weary to hold it up, and he kissed her softly many times. His compassion was too great to allow of the thrill the touch of her had always caused. He must look to her comfort first.

"Has Dinah taken care of you?" he asked. "You must have travelled all night."

"Yes, she helped me change," and she touched the white wrapper she wore. It was the same she had worn the night that seemed years ago, when she had told him she would marry him. It had hung in the closet ever since, and in those months of absence Varek's hand had often caressed it. He made her sit down and brought her everything he could think of for her comfort, and at last she rewarded him with a look less vague.

"You are not looking well," she said in her dull voice.

"I am all right. Are you feeling able to talk now or would you rather wait?" His first fright was over and it seemed to him that he could not endure the suspense.

Her hands came together in her lap tightly, the gesture he knew so well, and he asked, "Is it your mother, Peggy?"

"No, mother is well." From his knowledge it was the answer he expected, but not the one he wanted. He breathed a sigh and the vein in his forehead grew.

He prayed silently for wisdom and above all self-control. He told himself that when he had first looked into her face, he had known what it would be. Whatever it was she had come to ask, the fact remained that she *had come,* and she had said, "I have come back to you."

"Tell me who it is," he said. "I know enough for that."

She did not answer his question directly, "I did not do it deliberately," she said. "I have tried to keep faith with you—since the time I knew."

"But you love him?"

"Yes—I cannot help it." Her tone was final.

He swept her with a look of flame, but she met it with one of settled despair. It seemed to matter little to her, his anger or his compassion. She was in the grip of an emotion too strong for it to reach her.

Varek got up and walked to the window, and he stood long with his clenched hands in his pockets. His anger, his pity, his passionate love for her, and the burning fire of his jealousy, swept over him in turn and together. "What shall I do now, what can I do now?" repeated itself over and over again. It seemed to him that the heat waves that shimmered and wavered on the bank below, originated in his own brain. He would make her tell him everything, he guessed that she would wish to do that, but when it came to the final question, what would he do? And the man

who had taken her away from him—the blood pounded in his temples—he dared not hear his name until he was calm. He had always feared this, and yet it had taken him unprepared.

He turned at length and looked at her where she sat, her hands in her lap, her eyes on the floor, the wreck of the girl who had come so timidly into his office just a year ago; as that older man had done to the father, so had he done to the daughter. In the passions that tugged at him was there to be no consideration for her? Was he a man or just a beast outright, like that other that he had held by the throat? It was not the only time in the last months that he had asked himself the same question, only now it must be answered—after he had heard all—that must come first. Then there was that telegram in his pocket.

It was so still that the tick of the little gold clock, a present to her, was plainly audible from the bedroom beyond. He slowly gathered hold on his faculties. The main fact he knew, but all the rest was surmise, and what he must do first was to school himself to listen. He picked up the stool at his feet and brought it to her knee. Sitting there he could look directly into her face. He rested one hand on the back of the couch, and with the other he touched her clasped hands gently.

"I want you to tell me everything," he said, low but firmly. "I can do nothing until I know the facts. Did you want to tell me?"

She looked at him now. "I came back to do it," she said simply.

"Then be perfectly frank with me, don't mind detail—and, Peggy, don't consider me. I want the truth from you, the whole thing from beginning to end. If you promise me that, I will not interrupt. Tell me first of all his name."

She looked at him with a dull pain in her eyes. "Leo, I shall hurt you terribly—I did not know before what it was, that kind of misery. I know now and you must pardon me."

"God knows which one of us should ask pardon of the other," he said, thickly.

"I must go back for you to understand," she said. "You have never known much of what I was thinking, or how I felt. At first you didn't care very much; you had never thought of anybody but yourself and it was not easy for you to begin doing it. You wanted me to care and feel in a way I could not, and it nearly drove me to be a bad woman, I mean like the worst kind of women; I was almost there and I want you to know, for I don't think you realize that I could be like that.—In all this I have had that side of myself to fight.

"It was the old man at the book-stall that saved me then. He told me about my father, and he asked me if I were going to lose my soul too. It seemed to me that something that was hard and careless gave

way in me, and, Leo, after that I tried to love you. I tried to think sensibly and not wildly. I thought perhaps I could make something like the future you planned for us, that was why I consented; he had asked me if there was nothing I could turn to good in my life.—When you took me away to that beautiful place and left me to myself, I kept on trying; I wanted to enjoy just naturally everything about me. I would pretend nothing to you in my letters that I did not feel, but I never had a thought of changing things from the way you had planned. Then he came, Dorsey came, and I forgot," she swallowed with difficulty. "I knew him a long time ago in New York; we danced together,—the time I told you of,—and I saw him several times, he and his mother. I thought her wonderful, a woman whose esteem I should love to have, she seemed so just and above small things; I felt almost afraid of her, and I liked him very much. I was a little girl from the country, but he never made me feel it; he was very nice to me, and I never forgot him.

"He knew the Colonel and came to stay with him. It was the greatest surprise I ever had in my life, and that made me forget at first. He was one of our people, his family belonged among us, and mother and Mrs. Estiss liked him. I forgot everything. I wanted so much to be happy—for a little while——" She paused on the wistful note, and Varek moved rest-

lessly. "I should have told you, but it seemed no harm, and I never dreamed of the things that followed. I knew you would object, and take my companion from me, and when I realized, it was too late.

"We rode together and walked together. He was young like me—and happy. We loved the same things; I never had any regular schooling, but we had read the same things, and I could remember even better than he; for the first time since I was just a little girl I was really and truly happy." The slow color crept into her cheeks and her eyes lost their dulness. "I know now that I loved him all the time, when I thought we were friends, and that almost from the beginning he cared for me. I could make him wretched or happy with a word, and still I did not understand. Then when it did come to me that he loved me, I was glad. I shut my eyes to everything else. I would not think—I didn't read your letters—I talked to mother, and I didn't know what I said. One day I would walk with him and another I would not—I made him furious and happy; in the end I knew he would make me listen to him, but I was walking in a dream all day long, and I was doing him a dreadful wrong. Afterwards I wondered, I have wondered ever since how I could have done it.—'I will be happy,' I said, 'I will, *I will.*' It was my own selfish passion; I would think of no one else—and I paid for it——" The slight animation that had

lighted her face died out. "Then he made me hear him," she said in a low voice, "and he asked me if I loved him, and he——" She stopped.

"Go on," said Varek through his teeth.

"He kissed me, and I—we kissed each other; he did not need to ask me any more if I cared—he knew then." She was silent for a little and the man beside her breathed heavily. Then she went on: "He told me about the home he would take me to, about his mother, how proud he would be of me, of his work, and how I would inspire him, and I began to feel cold all over. Even as I sat there beside him, I could not drive away the terrible thoughts. They went down the hill with me, and came into my room, and were locked in there with me, for hours and hours, and all night.—I did not say 'I will be happy,' again.—I had deceived him, abominably; I could never go to his home, or stand before his mother, I was not fit. I had wanted him to care for me; I had broken faith with you, I who had felt so sure of what was right and wrong!" She stopped again, and put her hands to her head. "Oh!" she said, "that night—and those next days! It was only the thought of mother that kept me alive——" She pulled her hands down, staring into his drawn face. "Leo, I cannot go on—I can only tell you the main things. I told him I could not marry him—that I did not wish to; I would not see him or talk to him if I could help

it—and I—at last I begged him to go away. He couldn't understand me, and no wonder, for there was one thing he was sure of and that was that I loved him. I could not deny it—it was true, and I could give him no reason for my conduct. Leo, a dozen times a day I was on the point of going to him and letting everything else go. Oh, I understood then about you, and what it was like—and about him!

"Then at last he promised me to go—for I was nearly wild. Every day I was more and more afraid of myself, and we could not go on living like that in the same house. He promised me to go that night. He said he would give me time to think of what I was doing without any apparent reason, and what it meant to him. He promised, but he asked me to grant him one thing, and that was to let Colonel and Mrs. Carson take me to the dance at the hotel at Gainsville; we had all planned to go long before that. Perhaps he thought I might relent that night—I don't know—but it was a little thing to grant.

"There were people from all around, the better class, and one party from the Inn that drove over and came in late. Dorsey and I danced and I knew it was for the last time. He had told the Colonel that he was going, and they thought it was because we had quarrelled, but they saw us dance again and again. I saw nobody—I know I danced with others, but it was a blank to me—everything but his face. Then two

people passed close by and looked hard at me and I recognized them; they were the couple who came to the place up in the mountains, where we were together, before you came away. They stood by one of the windows talking. I told Mrs. Carson I wanted to go, and she said she was ready.—Then Dorsey came in and he looked strangely at me. He asked me to come outside for a moment, and he spoke to the Colonel—I thought he was asking him to wait for me while he said good-by. I felt sick all over—I had begged him to go and now he was leaving me. It was somewhere up back of the hotel to a seat in the rocks that he took me. His face was white and strange, and his eyes frightened me; he took hold of my arms and I shook in his hands. 'Tell me it's not true!' he said, 'what I overheard those people say—that you are married. They called you a bride. You stayed where they did, they said. Is that your reason and the secret that you have kept from every one?—For God's sake, tell me the truth, and stop treating me like a dog!' . . . What could I say?—My shame had found me out. Those that do wrong suffer for it, I believe they do—*always.* His respect for me was gone, and he spoke to me as he had never thought of doing before. He told me plainly that I had done my best to ruin his life, and that when things had gone too far I was only anxious to get him away—and he had thought me too good for any man. He laughed

and talked wildly, and I sat and thought. He didn't know what he was saying, and, Leo, I wasn't angry—I was so sorry for him. I had done that—I had made it possible for a good man, for he is that, to think such things." She stopped, her lips quivering, and looked down at Varek's big hand that had grasped a fold of her dress. The knuckles looked blue.

"I made up my mind then to tell him the truth. He would feel such a disgust for me he would leave me and save himself; it was only my shame that had kept me from doing it before. There would be no question then—it would all be over. . . . I told him the whole truth about you and me—I did not mean to make any plea for myself—I tried to be just. He was as still as if he were stone, and then he said quite quietly, 'It is not true,' and I said, 'It is.' Then he stood up and said in just the same way, 'I will kill him then.'" Varek threw back his head with a fierce gesture, but she went on without heeding him. "I told him I was going back to the hotel—he had not offered to say good-by to me. Nearly every one had gone, for it was dreadfully late. Colonel and Mrs. Carson had gone too, and Dorsey said he was going to drive me home, that he had told the Colonel so. 'You promised to go away,' I said, and he told me he had meant to go until he heard those people talk.

"There was nothing for me to do but to go. I

could not stay there, and I must think of mother. I must get home as soon as I could. He put me in the buggy and we drove without a word. It was very dark; there had been a moon earlier, but now it was cloudy and the wind came in puffs, and every now and then there was lightning; there was going to be a thunder-storm and people had hurried off. We had to crawl along, and the horse knew the road better than we. I thought of mother, but I felt sure that Mrs. Estiss would not let her know we had not come home, and when mother sleeps now it is so heavily.

"We were only a mile beyond Gainsville when the storm came. It was wind and thunder and lightning, at first, but we could not go on. The lightning showed a hay shed near the road, and Dorsey said we would have to wait there until we could go on. He was not angry with me, just quiet. He brought the cushions and the robe, and he made me a place in the hay; there was just a roof over us, and the sides were open. He wrapped me up in the robe and sat by me, and when the lightning came, I could see him just sitting still and staring straight before him. It seemed to me that there was a band of iron around my head and it was growing tighter and tighter and soon I should scream out loud—I couldn't hold it back." She spoke her sentence jerkily as if out of breath.

"I don't know how long we were there, but it was

a terrible storm. The lightning came every other minute, and the rain started; the trees twisted and the woods were full of the sound of breaking branches. At the worst of it there was suddenly a crack, and a flash like white daylight that struck us blind, and I cried out, but he was there and had his arms around me; I thought he had been killed. It was too much, and I sobbed out loud and he held me and would not let me go, but talked to me a long time. He told me that he loved me, over and over again, and that he would never let me come back to this life—to you. He said——" The first tears that she had shed rose in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. "He said I was a—good woman—in spite of everything—as good as his mother—and, Leo, he meant it. He said some of the things that you have said sometimes when you have wanted to convince me. He was perfectly calm, as if he had made up his mind—it was like heaven after that hour that had gone before, and I could not say anything; what was there to say?

"He said we should be married, that no one could touch me or dare to come near me then. That he would guard me for the rest of my life, and would try to make up to me in happiness for what I had suffered. He had decided all this in the half of a night, with me sitting there beside him, but I had had days to think, and I went over it all to him—his mother, those friends that were such a part of his life,

and his work in which he had been so successful—my story when it was known would ruin it all—and I told him about you—that you never let go a thing that you had made up your mind to have. . . . It was useless. I might as well have asked the wind out there to stop, and as he went on I knew in the end that I would go with him. Even as I told him all those things, I was agreeing to his arguments, while I knew they were unsound.

"He told me his plan, and it was simple, for it left all the trouble until afterwards. He wanted me to go to Summit the next afternoon, and we would be married, and come back and tell mother; that he would take charge of us from that moment, and no one had any right to interfere with us. He begged and pleaded with me and I said yes; I knew I would say it and if possible not keep my word.

"Then he made me rest and walked up and down before me until the rain stopped. It was wild still but we went on, I was so anxious about mother. It was gray light when we got home and Mrs. Estiss came down and let me in. She asked where Colonel and Mrs. Carson were; they had not come, and she thought we had been together somewhere out of the storm, and mother did not know. They came in a little later; they had come as far as the valley and had stayed at the Fishers'. Mrs. Estiss brought me my breakfast, and she knew that something was very

wrong with me. . . . Leo, I am just weak—I yield when I ought to be strong, and I have no capacity to help myself. I have always brought trouble to every one that I have known well; it began with mother and Paul. . . . I could not do what Dorsey asked me to do—the longer I thought the more impossible it became. It was because I loved him so much I could not do it. If I waited till afternoon I was lost; if he begged me I should go. As I lay on my bed I made up my mind. I took all your letters and burned them, and went to Mrs. Estiss. I told her I must go back to St. Louis, but that I would come back in a short time; that I should tell mother, and all I wanted was that she should guard her; that no matter what she heard she must not let it get to her; that if I did not know I should be with mother again in a short time, I would not go.

"She knew that I was only making an excuse, and she begged me to do nothing rash, but I told her that if I stayed I should do a thing I would regret all my life. I don't know how much she suspected, but she at last promised me about mother, solemnly, and she helped me. I wrote a note to Dorsey—I told him that I could not keep my promise, that so long as I had my senses I could not do him that wrong. I said that I was coming to you. That you should keep your word to me, that in spite of all he might say I belonged to you to take for your wife when the time

came, and I begged him, if he loved me, to forget me;—that it was the kindest thing he could do for me and for himself. . . . Mrs. Estiss was to see that he received it. Then there was mother, and I had to lie to her as always, and pretend about Miss Grantham; with my heart breaking, I had to laugh and pretend, and lie to my mother—up to the end. But I left her well and not worrying—poor little mother!" Varek moved again restlessly.

"I stole off to the Fishers' and made Stubby drive me to Summit. He looked frightened at my face, and he said he would do anything I asked him to do, that he would shoot a man down if I told him to. I don't know what he thought, but he meant Dorsey, and I told him that if anything happened to him it would kill me; that he was the best friend I had. I must have frightened him, for he could not speak, and he grew white when I said good-by. As long as I looked out he stood on the platform. It was fearfully hot all the way, and I missed my train at Nashville, and it made me twelve hours late, but at last I got here." She had gone on hurriedly toward the end and then was silent, and he sat still before her, his face gray, his eyes on the floor. After a while she reached out her hand and laid it on his shoulder, hesitatingly. "I didn't see what I could do, Leo, but come to you. I cannot struggle any more over anything, and I know you will keep your promise to me,

for now you love me better than yourself—it has taken you a long time to come to it, but it is so, and I was not afraid to come back here, Leo, not for a moment. I knew you would never ask me to live that life again—your letters this summer taught me that—and now I trust you—I never did before. I have told you everything, and you can judge for the future, whether you still want me for your wife or not. I am in your hands, and it is for you to choose. Only one thing I beg of you, for the sake of the past—that you will not let mother suffer; that no matter what comes to me, you will care for mother?—Leo, look at me!"

He raised his haggard eyes and looked into hers, that were as dull with trouble. A line of moisture had gathered on her lip, and she swayed, her eyes closing, and Varek put his arms about her, his touch and voice gentle. "Do you need to ask me?" he said. "You shall have anything for your mother that I can do—only try to get a little strength yourself. I—I've got to have time to think."

She drew a long breath, and he asked, "Can you sleep?"

"I feel as if I could never lift my eyelids again," she said. "I could not sleep those nights on the train."

"You must try and rest now," he said. He held her for a time against his breast, his trembling lips on her hair, and his eyelids slowly reddening; then

he laid her back on the pillows, arranging them for her comfort. "Try to sleep now, little one," he said. "I will sit here by you." He went to the raised blind and drew it down, and coming back to her side watched her pallid face until he was sure she slept. He looked upon his first defeat, and it seemed the end of all things to him. He could think only fitfully of the future, what he had endured during the last hour had dulled all power of connected thought, and yet there was urgent necessity; how was he to spare her what was to come? He could not look in her face and collect himself. He rose softly and went down to the black woman. "Watch her," he said, "and don't let anything wake her. I must go down the hill for a while." He descended the steps to the road and made the turn to the right along the bluff; if he could get away from the house, and the influence of its memories, possibly he could think.

IV.

THE SHATTERED MIRROR

"No, suh, she can't see yo' nohow!" Dinah reiterated. No one had ever called to see Janet before, and the woman had been so surprised at the demand of the young man at the door, that she had owned to her mistress being at home. But Varek's command was remembered in time.

"Why not?" the young man said sharply. His prominent blue eyes lighted with contempt of the black woman, and his thin lips curled in a disagreeable expression. There was something so unpleasant in his whole personality that one involuntarily glanced him over with the certainty of finding some deformity; he was undersized, and his body was somewhat disproportionately long for his legs, but it was not that that gave the impression. It was his face, really; the high blue-veined forehead, and unwholesome color, and the unusual expression in his eyes.

Dinah did not like the look of him. "She am clean tired out," she said shortly, "an' sleepin'," and she proceeded to shut the door, but the young man was too quick for her, and, not hesitating to push her aside, he stepped in.

"Go and tell her that there is some one here to see

her!" he commanded, in his high thin tones. It was a carrying voice and it reached Janet. She knew it well and she was up and on the stairs in a minute. She was still in her lace-covered wrapper, and sleep had brought two spots of color to her cheeks, and a feverish brilliancy to her large eyes. Her hair was loosened and fell low on her neck; she looked exotic against the dark wood of the stairway.

"Paul!" she exclaimed in amazement, "I thought you were in Colorado." She came on down, anxiety growing in her face.

"Doubtless," he said. "And you would be better pleased if I had remained there." It was the old tone of hostility, only intensified. Janet hardly knew how to approach him, and he paid no attention to her outstretched hand.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked then in pursuance of the old plan of ignoring his moods. "And Dinah will bring you something; it is so hot." She smiled at him doubtfully. "It seems good to see you again."

He looked her over from head to foot, a cruel look. "So," he said, "it's true what I suspected, and you are his mistress. Well, you look it."

She had turned and bent a little to draw a chair toward him, but at his words she came upright with a quick indrawn breath of pain. They stared a moment at each other. "You thought you were clever, you

two, and you would get me safely out of the way," there was a note of concentrated malevolence in his words that was sickening, "but I can bide my time when I want to, and now I'll have the law on you two." His voice rose higher. "You thought, between you, you could take my share, did you?" and then lowering into contempt, "A pretty specimen, you, for a Carew!"

"Oh, don't!" cried the girl, quivering and shrinking before him. "Paul, it was for you and mother. It was the only thing I could think of to save us!"

"Very well," he returned scornfully, "give me my share then, and the half of mother's; it belongs to me now that she is dead."

"What did you say then?" the tone was curiously low, and her eyes dilated strangely; she stretched her neck as if to listen.

"I say my share——"

"About mother—that last?" Her manner was so peculiar that it struck even through his self-absorption.

"That mother is dead, didn't you know it?" he spoke grudgingly.

Her face set like a mask with starting eyes. "It is not true. I saw her well, three days ago."

"I saw her too; I just came from there. I tell you, mother is dead!" his voice rose.

She stood still staring as if turned to stone, till

the thought struck her like a blow in the face; like a blow on a polished mirror, it struck and shivered the set mask into a thousand radiating lines, a network of twitching muscles. She turned and flung her hands to her head, and clasped it. "You told her," she said, without a trace of modulation in tone, "you told her about me and you killed her," and the cry of agony rang out high and shrill,—"Mother! mother!"

It reached Dinah upstairs, and Sam in the garden, and it came again and again. The black woman, crying out in answer to its piercing misery, came stumbling downstairs, but she was flung out of the way of the maddened creature. Footsteps rushed across the floor above them, and something crashed down with a terrific noise of splintering glass. A door closed with a sound that shook the whole house, and then there was only a dull, continued beating on the floor above their heads, and a regular moaning like an animal in pain.

They listened, the three of them in terror, and Sam crept behind the woman. Paul had shrunk and cowered at her wild cries, and now he dragged himself up to the black woman; he looked dwarfed and evil.

"Go upstairs," he said, his high voice breaking. "Pound on the door and make her listen. Say that I did not tell mother; she died before I got there. Go say those words to her, 'He did not tell your mother.' "

The woman retreated before him, her eyes rolling. "Yo' git outer here!" she said.

"Go tell her what I told you!"

The woman stepped back against Sam, and she looked down. He was still holding the hatchet he had been using in the garden, and she snatched at it. "Git outer here!" she repeated, coming forward. "Yo' git, befo' I splits yo' head."

"Go tell her," he said again, moving back.

"I done see yo' go fust." She drove him to the door, and followed him to the steps. "Yo' walk along mighty quick," she called down to him, "else I fling dis on yo' head." She watched him off the steps and up the road, before she went back to the shaking Sam. "What is we goin' ter do now?" she said. "Fo' de Lord's sake, where am Mr. Leo!"

They crept upstairs and knelt at Janet's dressing-room door, and the woman called to her and pleaded to be heard, but the beating noise and the moaning never ceased. They were kneeling on piles of broken glass. The long cheval-glass in its white enamel and gold frame lay shattered on the rose-colored carpet; it had stood in her way.

They went downstairs and waited, and Dinah sent Sam to the steps. "Ef he comes yo' wave him ter hurry," she commanded, but she had gone upstairs again in vain, and the shadows had lengthened toward evening when Sam at last called to her.

Varek had the story before he reached the stairs, and they followed after him. He stopped before her door and called twice to her loudly, but there was no answer, and he tore at the lock; then putting his shoulder against the door he burst it in, the two trembling blacks at his back.

The girl lay a huddled heap on the floor, her face in the carpet, and her torn and disheveled hair twisted and streaming about her. Her outstretched hand held something hard and she struck with it, up and down on the floor monotonously. Before Varek reached her she crawled a few feet always moaning. Everything within reach was dragged and pulled about; it was a scene in a mad-house.

Varek lifted her and carried her past the weeping servants. "Bring me some water with ice in it, and towels," he said as he passed them, and they hurried to obey him. He took her in to the couch and, still holding her in his arms, he pushed back her damp and matted hair, and looked in her face. It was swollen and distorted almost beyond recognition, and her glazed eyes took no notice of him, or of anything.

They brought him the water, and he wrung out the towel, and wiped her face and neck, pulling away the torn lace that clung to it. He loosened her stiff fingers from the heavy paper-weight it clutched, and put them into the cold water. She shivered but gave no other sign. If he could only reach her conscious-

ness, and call back a spark of reason before it was gone forever! He propped her up against the couch, and kneeling, took her by the shoulders. "Come here," he said to the colored woman. "Tell her what that boy said—shout it to her, only make her hear!" He shook the girl almost roughly, "Listen, Peggy," he commanded. "Dinah is telling you about your mother!" Her eyes moved from him to the woman, an uncomprehending stare.

"Come closer," he urged the woman, "and speak louder." Dinah repeated again and again, and a flicker of something like understanding crept into her gaze. Varek followed it up. He drew the long telegram from his pocket and spread it on her knee; he spoke to her as one would to the deaf. "It is from Mrs. Estiss," he said, emphasizing each word. "See, I am reading it to you,—'Mrs. Carew passed away when asleep this afternoon. Janet reaches St. Louis this evening. Give her this message—her mother knew nothing. She was talking happily of Janet just before she fell asleep, and I was beside her. She went without pain or anxiety, like a child. Paul came this evening, has left for St. Louis. Telegraph me what to do. Take care of her until I come. Estiss.' "

He read it over twice, and she bent gradually as if she were listening, and put her finger then on the words, pointing them out slowly and whispering them

to herself like a child with its first lesson. Varek motioned the woman to his place beside her and went to the telephone. He beckoned Sam then to the hall. "In half an hour, go up to the corner and watch for a buggy with a white horse. A colored boy will be driving. It's the Doctor; he is an old man with a gray beard; show him the way here."

When he came back the girl's head was on the woman's shoulder, and her eyes closed; every muscle was relaxed and she breathed like one asleep. They laid her down, and Varek fanned her, listening with every nerve alert for the step on the stairs. The unaccustomed words of prayer rose within him and formed in whispers on his lips, "Lord, save her. Do to me as I deserve, but, Lord, save her!" Varek did not know that he had spoken; prayer had formed no part of his creed, it was simply the unconscious cry of a soul in distress, that recognizes its own helplessness.

The moments dragged by slowly, and the swollen lines of the face on the pillow gradually faded into pallor, which in its turn gave place to a growing crimson flush. The muscles of her face began to twitch, and her hands moved spasmodically. A line of white showed under her lashes, and half-formed words escaped her lips. The old Doctor came at last, and his heavy brows lifted ominously at the sight. Varek whispered him what explanation there was to give, there would be more to tell later.

"Shock," said the old man, "yes, that's plain enough to see!" He lifted the girl's eyelids, observing closely the dilated pupils; he touched her wrists, and asked a question or two, and spoke gravely enough to the white-faced man beside him. "She is very ill," he said.

"Can you save her?"

The old man studied Varek's face from under his shaggy brows. "That I cannot tell you," he replied, "but I shall try—I would send for Mrs. Estiss; she knows her, and I don't know any one so capable when it comes to a fight like this."

V.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

THE scorching days and the breathless nights passed slowly by in the secluded house on the hill, each freighted with its weight of terrible anxiety. Varek never left its threshold, Mrs. Estiss came and took her place by the bedside, and the old Doctor spent every moment he could spare within its walls. The three were struggling shoulder to shoulder to keep alight the flickering flame of life.

As for Janet, she was wandering through a world of shadows, hither and thither, without rest or pause, except when darkness reached out for her, seeking to draw her so deep into its encompassing folds that the quiet should be forever.

Varek had given the Doctor an exact account of Janet's history, only withholding their relation to each other; he would have no right to speak of that. "It's easier to fight an enemy by daylight than in the dark," he said, "and the more you know about her, the better you will be able to help her," and the old man had nodded. Mrs. Estiss had talked freely to the Doctor, too; she understood now, and her lips came together in a straight line as she listened to the monotonous flow of words from the sick girl. As

for Varek, she never spoke to or looked at him if she could help it. They cut off Janet's beautiful long hair, and she had taken it to him and laid it on the table, almost under his hand, and her anger had some satisfaction at the sight of his haggard look. "Was that necessary?" he had scarcely more than whispered, and she did not answer him.

The Doctor knew also, but he was a very wise old man and he had known and heard many strange things in his almost forty years of practice, and though a scrupulous man himself, had learned a broad and understanding view of life. He looked curiously at the strong man who grew perceptibly thinner and more gray as the days passed and the chance of a winning fight grew less; being a strong man himself, as time went on compassion took the place of curiosity. He could not withhold it when the other would stand by the girl's bedside and listen to that one reiterated cry, a pleading with her lover to come to her. Varek's name never crossed her lips. Her one absorbing passion, the last impression on her over-wrought brain before the blow struck her, had seemingly driven out all recollection of him. She went back to her childhood sometimes, to her mother and Paul, but it was only to come back to those last few weeks, and their happiness and separation.

After one of those scenes, the Doctor had consulted with Mrs. Estiss and sought Varek in the little book-

lined room where he spent his days. He found him sitting as he did by the hour, tipped back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, his eyes on the river. He had started alert to the summons that he had begun hourly to expect, but the Doctor held up his hand.

"No, no," he said, "I only want to consult with you."

"Well?" said Varek.

"The young man for whom she asks all the time—if he can be reached, I think we ought to get him. We must leave nothing undone, and in that state of the brain—well, I have known strange things to happen."

"You think it might help her?"

"That I cannot tell—at this rate it is barely possible she may pull through physically, but mentally—I would not answer for her reason. My hope is in her wonderful constitution."

Varek had raised a paper-cutter that lay before him, and was studying its carved handle while the Doctor spoke, and did not look up when the old gentleman had finished. "I had thought of it," he said quietly. "I telegraphed to him when this began. I had to wait a day until he reached New York, but he will come now—I should think to-morrow."

"Good!" the Doctor had said, and it was in him to say more, but the deep lines in the half-averted

face before him called for reserve, and he went out quietly.

The next day passed and another hot night. Dorsey did not come, and the girl was fast growing weaker. Early in the morning Varek came in and looked once at the hollow-eyed, parched face on the pillow, and went silently out; the Doctor came towards noon and looked too, and made his preparations to stay; the medicine glass shook in Mrs. Estiss's hand, for she had had a woman's faith and it was hard to give up hope.

Janet had alternated all day between stupor and delirium, but in her weakness her voice was scarcely above a whisper. It was frightfully hot, a suffocating, choking heat, under a brazen sky, cloudless save for an edge of white that showed in the western horizon. "The people in town slept by the hundred on the pavements," the Doctor told Mrs. Estiss. "It's cruel weather for a well man, but for her——" They had held a consultation the day before, the Doctor and the best talent of the city, but they had found nothing to suggest; they could not improve on his treatment.

The day drew to a close in a dull fiery sunset, and Mrs. Estiss prayed for a cool breeze, but the puffs of air that crept along the bluffs were like the breath from an open furnace. It had grown so dark that they had turned on the carefully shaded light and

the Doctor took his place by the bedside. Janet lay still, scarcely breathing, and Varek sat just outside the door. Suddenly he moved and went to the balcony, listening; his head went up and his eyes gleamed; there was a sound on the flight of steps. He went in and beckoned to Mrs. Estiss, "He has come," he said; "go down," and turning went to his room and locked the door.

The young man below clung to Mrs. Estiss's hand. "Am I in time?" he asked. The perspiration stood in beads on his white face, and at her answer he wiped it away with a shaking hand. He looked terribly spent, and she brought him cold water.

"Try to pull yourself together," she cautioned; "you will need your strength."

"I thought I was too late—it was that," he said, and followed her up and to the bedside. The light was dim and there was nothing in the face on the pillow that he recognized but the great wide eyes. She was whispering now, and as he bent over her he caught his name repeated more than once. The Doctor had made way for him, and he sat, his lips close to her ear, and instinctively he answered her, calling her name again and again. She turned her head restlessly about, then paused as if listening to a whisper in the far distance; the next moment she had sunk into stupor.

The bed as he leaned against it felt like fire, and

she was swallowed up in it; the hand he touched burned his lips. A faint breath of something cooler was wafted from the window, and there came over him a longing to assuage that torment of heat that wrapped her about. His act was born of the wish, instinctive, without forethought. He reached in and, passing his arms under the wasted form, lifted it out and stood upright.

The Doctor sprang toward him, but Mrs. Estiss held him back. "Leave him alone," she whispered. "He may be wiser than any of us."

Dorsey held her carefully, and began walking up and down, as one would with a little sick child. Mrs. Estiss came softly after him and put a light cover over her, pinning it loosely together over her feet, and the young man went on walking slowly up and down, back and forth, his eyes on the face on his arm. She never stirred or breathed a word.

The Doctor came and walked with him a few moments, his fingers on her pulse, and then sat down and waited. A faint murmur crept along the face of the bluffs, and a little later a rush of wind bent the tops of the trees; the stars were being lost in the gathering clouds. Could it be that it would grow cooler? A feeling of hope rose in Mrs. Estiss as she sat motionless. The wind came again, more steadily, and really cooler, and then a few drops of rain fell on the sill.

The Doctor got up again, and touched Janet's hand. It was slightly moist, and something glistened on her brow. He could have called out in joy, but he only whispered to Dorsey, "Can you go on? You will save her!" The young man's eyes shone in his white face, and he braced his numb arms, for her slight weight had begun to drag on him like a ton, and the pain that shot across his shoulders was almost unbearable. The rain had begun to fall, first in big drops, and then in a settled downpour, and the coolness helped him. He kept on twenty minutes longer, the Doctor now by his side, but then he knew his arms would fall; he staggered to the bedside, and he could not bend, but the Doctor and the nurse lifted her. They pushed him down in the seat beside her, and his head sank to the pillow. *"Ach, Gott sei Dank!"* said the Doctor fervently, in the language of his childhood, and it translated itself in Dorsey's fading consciousness.

It was later that Mrs. Estiss knocked on Varek's door, and he opened to her, his face ghastly white against the darkness behind him. She met his look and the first pity she had felt for him prompted her words. "She will live," she said simply.

A wild look crossed his face and his hand sought the door-jamb for support; then he moved to shut himself in again, but she said, "No, come! They are both asleep." Mrs. Estiss had her purpose, and noth-

ing would deter her. He followed her then and stood within the door, his eyes on them. Her dark head was plain against the pillow, and close to it the lighter one; even in the dimness he could make out the young fellow's clear-cut features, white in the sleep of exhaustion. He stood long and his breathing was the only sound that broke the stillness—that and the drip of the water from the roof.

There was that in his look that made the woman follow him out, but he spoke quietly and rationally to her. "I shall go," he said, "to-night. When she is well she may ask for me—I will not come before. You must take charge here." She started to speak, but he lifted his big shoulders impatiently and went on to his room.

VI.

A BUTTERFLY AND THE GRANITE

Mrs. Estiss had asked for Varek and been shown into his private office. She was a little early, for he had not yet come in, and she sat looking curiously around the handsomely furnished room. She liked its presiding genius no whit better than the first day she had seen him, but in those last weeks he had compelled her reluctant admiration. He had never come near the house on the bluff, and when Mrs. Estiss had seen him it was purely in a business way at his office; on those occasions he never asked her a question about Janet, except those that bore on her recovery; for that he also telephoned daily.

Mrs. Estiss wondered how much he knew of what had passed since the night he had left. She guessed that he saw the Doctor often, but she knew that the girl had kept her own counsel with him as she had with her, until that day.

Varek kept her waiting only a short time, his keen eye lighting on her with a swift scrutiny the moment he entered the room, but hers was not an easy face to read and he gathered nothing from it. Mrs. Estiss thought, as she met his eyes and spoke briefly to his greeting, that he had aged a year or two even since

she had last seen him. The gray was thick in his dark hair and mustache, and it struck her that he moved much more slowly. He looked to her as a man of his age and build might after a severe illness, and yet she knew, as every one connected with Varek did, that he was working as he always had, indefatigably.

"Is it anything important?" he asked her when he was seated. "Any backset?"

"No," she said, "nothing of that kind. She has been gaining steadily, but she has asked me to give you a message. She wants to see you."

He passed his hand quickly across his face, she wondered if to hide his expression, but his voice was perfectly controlled as he asked, "Very well—when?"

"This evening."

"Did you explain to her about their property," he said, "at the time I asked you to?"

"Yes, it was the first thing I told her when I thought she was able to grasp it."

"That was some time ago then?"

"It was before Dorsey Carroll left," she said, with a flash of her eye. She knew it was what he wanted to ask.

He drew a quick breath, and getting up with some of his old alertness unlocked a drawer in his secretary and brought a paper back to his seat. He unfolded it and laid it partly on Mrs. Estiss's knee. It was a map marked off in sections, showing different tracts.

He put his finger on one section outlined in dark red. "That is their land," he said. "You see this whole mining section—and that? It lies directly between, and is very valuable. She knows nothing of business, and you do, and I want you to judge of it. You know Mrs. Carew left me as guardian for her children, but I want her daughter to be perfectly independent in her choice of any one she wishes to have look after her interests. If I remain her guardian, I should like some one appointed to act with me, or if Janet prefers I will withdraw altogether. That is one thing I am asking you to explain to her, and the other is this: they ought to have their own money, and of course this is bringing them in nothing. My advice would be to sell outright this little corner—it's only the smallest bit of the whole—and the Elmo Company will pay well for it. It will bring them enough to make them perfectly comfortable, and Janet will then feel no dependence on any one. The rest of this property, managed right, will make them rich. Please take this map to her and explain fully all I have told you now and in our interview before. What I have wanted her to feel, is that she has no pecuniary obligation to any one."

Mrs. Estiss thought for a little. "How about the boy?" she said.

"Paul?" Varek's face darkened. "Mrs. Carew's will was a wise one, and I don't hesitate to say that

I advised her. He can't touch a penny of the principal until he is twenty-five, and then only under conditions. He has a monthly allowance, no more, and as long as I am his guardian I keep my eye on him."

"He is still here, is he?" Mrs. Estiss asked. "Janet will want to know."

"Yes, and likely to stay—I think he has found his vocation at last." Varek's lip lifted, and his tone was cutting. "He is a full-fledged healer now."

"A healer!" said the woman, puzzled.

Varek laughed shortly. "Well, according to his own account he 'descended into hell' a few weeks ago, and certainly judging from the way he spent his time he is quite correct. Having sufficiently disported himself with the devil, he fell ill and was nursed by a magnetic gentleman with a white beard and many disciples, principally females. This man heals by the laying on of hands, and the method appealed to the peculiar temperament of our Paul, and he began rapidly to 'ascend unto heaven.'

"He is now an active convert, and his enthusiasm is touching. I had heard something of all this, so I went last night to hear him preach. It would have done your soul good to have heard his characterization of sin, and certainly some of his personal experiences, which he chose to impart to us, bore upon the subject. He seems to be blissfully happy, a sound believer in apostolic living, and as long as his monthly stipend is

as regular and ample as it is, the holy man whose humble follower he is will guard him as the apple of his eye."

"He is insane, of course," said Mrs. Estiss.

"Oh, I don't know," Varek returned. "Where are you going to draw the line?" His eyes dropped to the floor and he tapped abstractedly on the desk. "All summer I have been trying to explain a character by that method; it's a convenient one but too elastic. It's like attempting to account for one's sins on the ground of heredity, and is neither convincing nor comforting, particularly if one is given too constant an object lesson. Poor Paul can have the benefit of that excuse, I suppose, if it can be considered as such. It served my purpose once and I'd do well not to sneer!" and his face twitched.

Mrs. Estiss sat wondering what he meant, but he shrugged away the subject, and looked up. "Is there anything else?" he asked.

"Yes," she said shortly, "there is."

Varek knew perfectly well how she regarded him and her tone amused him slightly. He smiled at her with his eyes as well as his lips, his pleasantest expression. "Well," he said, "out with it!"

She hesitated, plainly both reluctant and disapproving. There was indignation, too, that brought a tremor to her usually collected tones. "I am the bearer of two messages from Janet to you, Mr.

Varek," she said, "but I want you to understand that I did everything in my power to dissuade her from both her decisions; I was unsuccessful, or I would not be here. I could not refuse to act as her messenger, I did not think it was wise to do so—she is strangely determined when she wishes to be. It was unnecessary, all that about the property; I listened to you for my own benefit, and that in the future I might know better how to help her. She asks me to say that she places her property in your hands absolutely, to manage as you think best for her. She is perfectly satisfied with her mother's will, and wishes you to use your best judgment in regard to Paul." As she spoke Varek's face changed entirely; his smile had faded, but the look that took its place was full of restrained emotion that softened every hard line. "That is like her," he said gently.

Mrs. Estiss forced herself to go on. "She also asked me to tell you that she had positively refused to marry Dorsey Carroll, and that so far as she is concerned it is final—and she wants to see you."

A flash of vivid expression lighted Varek's face and flooded it with a surge of color. A man who has waited for days in sight of the gallows and suddenly has a free pardon thrust upon him might look like that. It altered nothing to him in the end, but he was human and for a few moments reveled in his possibility, heedless of Mrs. Estiss's presence. Then gradually he took on the expressionless quiet that his

competitors in the financial world knew well. He looked up finally and met Mrs. Estiss's blazing eyes indifferently. "Thank you," he said. "I imagine that wasn't very easy for you."

"You are right, it wasn't!" she burst out. "A woman has a right to her happiness, and I know more than one that has thrown it away as she is doing, out of exaggerated unselfishness. And you, and men like you, what do you care, provided you profit by it!" The woman had risen in uncontrollable emotion. "I am going to tell you what I think of you, and I don't care what comes—I——"

Varek interrupted her imperiously. "You will kindly control yourself instead," he said, his eyes like steel. "You have delivered your messages, and you must receive my answer. After that I give you leave to say what you please."

The woman stood, her thin, angular figure quivering, but Varek changed his tone. "Sit down, please," he said wearily. "We have her future to think of, and you will help her best by listening to me. As for me, I'm a past number—let me be."

Mrs. Estiss sat down, but it was without any diminution of her hostile attitude; Varek seemed to be lost in thought for a time, and unconscious of her; then he said steadily, his eyes on the floor, "Mrs. Estiss, if I go up there to her to-night, she will offer to keep the promise she made me—she will do it for his sake first of all, and partly for mine—and I should

take her. Just to see her would be too much for me; I should plead for myself—nothing would hinder me."

"Why do you talk to me about it?" said Mrs. Estiss bitterly. "It's what you intend to do."

"It is what I do *not* intend to do."

"You mean you won't go to her?"

"Yes."

"That you will give her up?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it!" she spoke more to herself than to him.

"From the time I sent to him to come to her, it's been my intention—I had time in those fearful days to make up my mind, and I am going to keep to it. This thing of her sending him away—it don't mean anything in the end. He's a man and the right sort and he'll only care the more—it will work out of itself—that——" His head dropped lower. "You see she's a little like her brother, unlike as they appear to be; it's a devotion to some paramount idea. From the time she was a little girl it was her imagined obligation to her mother and Paul, because of that accident—she counted herself as nothing in comparison to their welfare. It was a condition that could be taken advantage of—by one who had the will to do it. Now it's this boy she loves, and it will hold good for a time, but I know the outcome perfectly." He lifted his head and saw her amazed look, and his lips twitched in a slight smile.

"Never mind, Mrs. Estiss," he said. "I don't blame you for wanting to lay it on; you can't say a thing to me I haven't said to myself; you may give it to me to your heart's content, only for God's sake go on caring for her—she is so well worth it. You think you know her, but you don't know her as I do. She has a man's fair-mindedness and a good woman's honesty; she's sweet and patient, and true, and in all the time I have known her, I never once have seen her lose her innate refinement. She has taught me things I didn't know existed, and others that I had spent the better part of my life in forgetting. . . . Now I beg you to take a message for me. Please tell her that it is my earnest wish that she should be happy, and that I think she will be most so with the man she loves. That I cannot trust myself to see her or to write—she knows me and will understand. Tell her not to write to me either; perhaps she will once in a while to the Doctor, for I know she likes and trusts him, and as long as you are with her perhaps you will forgive me enough to let me know how she is?" Mrs. Estiss made some inarticulate reply, but Varek seemed satisfied.

"Now about the property—I want her to let the Doctor act with me; he's a sensible man and she's bewitched him, too. Then last of all I want to ask her a favor. Some time ago her old home was for sale; the man who took it from her father put it on the market and I bought it; I thought it would please

her to have it. It went for a song and she loves it. I want her to go back among her people, and forget as much of the past as she can—her—lover—can court her—there—by and by." His face twitched convulsively, and he got up, walking away from Mrs. Estiss where she sat. A hot spot of color showed in her sallow cheeks, and her eyes were very bright as they followed his movements, first to one window, then the other.

He looked down on the granite sill where Janet had seen the scarlet butterfly rest over a year ago, his eyes unseeing, when he felt a touch on his arm; he had forgotten Mrs. Estiss. She choked a little; she was never gracious in manner, but under emotion she was doubly brusque. "I beg your pardon," she said, "for the things I have been thinking of you. You have it in you to be a really good man."

Varek looked at her in amazement for a moment and then he broke into unsteady laughter. "Good heavens, Mrs. Estiss!" he said. "I've heard a good many adjectives applied to myself, but never that one. I'll remember it when next I feel the devil stirring!"

But Mrs. Estiss had something more to say. "I will stay with her as long as she needs me," she said positively. "I promise you."

Varek's eyes lighted with pleasure. "That's spoken like a man," said he warmly. "Perhaps you will shake hands with me," and their hands met in silence.

VII.

THE BETTER FIGHT

It was late in the afternoon of the third of July that Braun joined Ehrenstein at his desk for a few words before leaving the office. Varek had just passed them on his way out, and spoken a pleasant good-night. "Don't celebrate too hard to-morrow," he said. "I suppose you will do all there is to be done."

"You bet!" cried Ehrenstein. "They say some of the fireworks will be out of sight. You're going to that dinner at the club, ain't you, with the big guns?"

"Well, not if I can help it! Of all the nuisances they're the worst!" Varek shrugged disgustedly.

The young men eyed him with undisguised envy. "Gee, I wish I were in your shoes," said Ehrenstein. "I'd not turn up my nose at the champagne."

Varek looked at them a moment, the two keenly alive American faces, typical of the street, alert, pushing, unsatisfied, and his own face, settled into somber lines. "Don't wish that," he said heavily. "I happen to have walked in them myself, so I know what I am talking about. Be satisfied with your own shoe leather, and don't bother to wear it out too fast,

either." There was a note of deep earnestness in his words that held the attention of the two. They had never heard it from him before. "You see," he continued awkwardly, "I've walked about forty years since I could first remember, and I have some years the advantage of you in travel, and I've just reached a conclusion or two. It pays to walk straight, according to the rules of good walking, and to look sharp to the way you are travelling. You'll avoid trampling on the other man then, and be less likely to be kicked in return. You won't be so likely to run down in the heel, or fall on your own nose either." He paused in face of the puzzled surprise of the two, and laughed out as cover to his embarrassment. "That's my Fourth of July speech," he said. "I'll give it to them to-morrow night; think they will like it?"

The two looked doubtful how to take him; then Ehrenstein saw it as a joke. "Say, it'll do fine; give it to them under the head of 'The Expenditure of Shoe Leather.'"

"Thanks for suggestions," said Varek gravely as he turned to go, "but that wasn't all nonsense I was talking, though. You think it over a bit."

"Well!" said Ehrenstein, after Varek had gone, "that's curious, Braun; what's come over him, anyway?"

Braun shook his head. "You know some people say he's taken that divorce hard. She got it, you know."

"Rot!" exclaimed Ehrenstein, "I know better, so do you. He didn't care a cent for her."

"No, I don't think it's that, and he is not bumming round, either. He's at the —— Club you know, lives there, and the fellows say he keeps early hours. He gets out of every social thing he can and even cuts the stag dinners; he don't seem to care a thing for all this whirl that's on."

"He don't neglect business," said Ehrenstein.

"I should think not! You'd know if you kept the books. He could wind things up here in twenty-four hours if he wanted to, he's got them in such good shape."

"He's turned down a lot of things this winter—wouldn't touch 'em."

"Well, he didn't need to," said Braun.

"But it ain't like Varek," insisted Ehrenstein. "When did you know him to let up on a thing if there was money in sight?"

"You're right. Say, Ehrenstein, you know I have my theory about him, and I've watched him for a long time. I think he's a sick man—something really wrong with him, and he knows it."

"It would explain a lot," said Ehrenstein thoughtfully.

"He acts queer; now just last night I was out at the Gardens with Miss Hammersmith"—Braun spoke with pardonable pride—"and we'd been round the lagoon and were strolling back when who should

come along but Varek. He was walking along slower than we were, with his hands behind his back, and he passed us this close and looked right into our faces. The lights were so bright I knew him yards away, but he never saw us any more than if we were air. He was looking sick enough then."

"What time was that?" asked Ehrenstein quickly.

"About ten."

"Well I saw him too, but it was later, and I've been thinking about it all day; it was when I came away from the Commercial—it must have been twelve or after. I came out and cut right across the street and was walking toward Olive, when I saw an old man on the other side trying to take in every inch of the sidewalk he could. Oh, Lord, but he was drunk! It was bright moonlight and he'd lost off his hat, and I knew him right away; it was old Bronson. You've seen him like that—guess everybody has—and I stopped wondering if I ought to go over; it looks kinder ugly to see an old white-haired man in such a fix. Well, I'd just started across when I saw that there was a man following him. He walked slow, and stopped when the old man did, and I can tell you I was surprised when I saw it was Varek. I didn't see any call for me to show myself, and I just stepped back against the electric light pole and waited. Well, the old man kept on making letter S's, and all at once he went down. Varek was at him in a flash—

you know how quick he is—and lifted him up and braced him against the lamp-post, and then I guess old Bronson recognized him, for he gave a squeal and hung onto the post, striking out with his fists at Varek and calling out, 'Help! help! he'll kill me, help!' He was as hoarse as a frog but I heard him, and it made me sorter sick the way he squealed. Just then a Johnnie turned out of the alley above and made for them, and I guess the old man collapsed, for he was quiet, but Varek talked to the cop and then they lifted him up and carried him on to the Club."

"It isn't the first time they have put him to bed there," grunted Braun in disgust. "The old sot!—I don't wonder his family have gone to Europe and are going to stay there."

"What do you suppose the old man yelled out like that for, though? He looked too drunk to know anything." Ehrenstein had evidently been impressed.

"How can anybody tell! He's probably so muddled he's crazy." Braun spoke with contempt. He had little compassion for the socially damned. "He's been turned out of every club in town but the Commercial, or rather he's been so cold-shouldered he's kept away.—But talking of Varek—a friend told me that Varek had stood up for the old man at the —— Club right along, and had managed to keep him in until he went about openly with that Travers woman—that was too much for anybody. We saw him last

night at the Gardens with another hard case in tow, and it wasn't eight months ago Miss Hammersmith and I went to that ball the Bronson girls gave." Braun sighed.

"But I can't make out why the old man was so scared when he saw Varek," Ehrenstein persisted. "Now I'll tell you what Binny told me in confidence last winter, and of course you won't repeat it—he said it was Varek that loaned Bronson the money that pulled him out of the hole last winter, you know when he was in trouble over the Consolidated Electric. He did it through Binny, and said he didn't want the old man to know, but of course Binny told; then what's he yelling out like that at Varek for?"

"I can't tell you, but he's rotten bad, that old man, and I'm sorry for the girls. He can't last much longer the way he is going, but they'll never have the position here they used to have, and I say it's a shame." Braun shook his head with some feeling. "He's gone right down since the time the *Morning Press* got after his real estate."

"He was chesty enough before that," mused Ehrenstein. "Gee, I used to feel like begging his pardon for living. Just the same, I'm kinder sorry for him—it can't be any fun for him when he happens to be sober."

"I suppose not," admitted Braun, "but I've got to go or I'll be late for dinner."

"Me too!" said Ehrenstein, jumping up. "Wish you a jolly Fourth, Braun."

Varek had walked out to his club, for it was not too hot, and immediately after dinner he started off to see the Doctor. It was rarely that the old gentleman was called out early after dinner and Varek had formed the habit of dropping in upon him then. He was the only person who knew anything about Varek during that long winter and spring, and the two had come to enjoy each other's society.

The Doctor's thirty years of remunerative practice had made almost no difference in his way of living. His home life was as simple as it always had been. There was the same thrifty, German atmosphere, unchanged in all those years. When he lost his wife, his sister came to care for his children and his home, and like the Doctor's wife she was a real Hausfrau. It took Varek back to his early boyhood; he even dropped back into German speech.

The old gentleman smoked execrable tobacco, one of his early economies that clung to him still in spite of his appreciation of a good cigar. During Varek's visits his cigar case lay open between them and he would watch with smiling eyes the look of quiet joy that settled on the old Doctor's grizzled face. His shaggy eyebrows would come down until they almost hid his deeply-set eyes, and he would sink a

foot or so into his leather chair. He almost never spoke until he had finished his first cigar, and Varek knew enough not to disturb him. Then there followed the half hour or so that was Varek's greatest pleasure; they would talk of Janet, sometimes only a word or two, and then again the Doctor would mention that he had a letter, and it would find its way to Varek's hand and later into his inner pocket, and then it was the Doctor that would smile quietly to himself. Those letters never came back to the old man, and he took good care not ask for them, but they often formed the topic of conversation.

This evening the Doctor remarked that he had had two letters, and Varek looked an inquiry. "One is from Mrs. Estiss," he said, and there was an undercurrent of amusement in his voice. "She delivers her opinion of the shiftless ways about her at some length, and says she does not wonder that there are only two of the old families left there, and that the old homes have gone into other hands. It's a business proposition she makes—she wants to work the farm on shares, she doing all the management. She says she can 'make the niggers work,'"—the Doctor laughed silently—"and I don't doubt her statement. Janet, she says, is willing if we advise it, so there it is—the best nurse I ever knew turned farmer."

"Does Janet really want it, do you think?"

"Well, you can judge from her letter; I am of the

opinion that she does, but you would better read it." The Doctor turned to his cigar, and Varek drew the student lamp nearer to him.

The letter was a longer one than usual, and, with the almost abnormal acuteness the long brooding on one subject had developed in him, he marked a change from her usual manner. She always wrote cheerfully, and apparently without reserve, for she had become very good friends with the Doctor, but this was different. There was a note of joy subdued but insistent throughout it all; she wanted Mrs. Estiss to take charge of the place, there could be no one better; she described with delight her new saddle horse, and the old note of deference to him was there. "Mr. Varek, she knew, would think Dolly perfectly safe." She asked after him as she did in every letter she wrote, but this time she said more. "You say he is not looking well—I have thought over what you wrote. Try, please, to persuade him to take better care of himself —and you will not forget what you promised me?"— Varek flushed slowly. Then she went back to her joy, and at the end it was made plain. "I had a very great surprise the other day," she wrote. "Mrs. Carroll came to see me. She stayed a long time and she was very charming. She has come a number of times since, and we often ride together. She rides beautifully, and is so tall and handsome, I feel like a little thing beside her; I wish you could see her, for

you couldn't help admiring her as I do. She is staying with some relatives, not far from here, the Penriff Dorseys, two very old people, and she says she is lonely for young people, so she comes often—I did not see how she could like me, but she is so very nice to me, and I never have known any one just like her—so wise and so kind, too."

Varek folded the letter carefully, and held it, his eyes fixed on the fire. Then he met the Doctor's understanding look. "So, that is the way it will be," he said. "She will do more for her son in a week than he could do for himself in five years. His mother has come to his assistance—a sensible, clever woman of the world, I take her to be," and he fell silent.

The Doctor smoked his cigar to its delightful end, and then he asked, "And how much longer are you going on like this?"

Varek turned on him in quick surprise, but the Doctor was never to be hurried. "I have trained myself to look on a good many things of which I don't approve," he said; "it's none of my business. But looking after your health is, and I don't propose to let you head straight for trouble and not tell you of it."

"Well," said Varek, "what's wrong?"

"Everything. You are going to have a serious break-down as sure as I am living."

"Nonsense!" said Varek, and he added bitterly; "what difference does it make any way?"

"A good deal to you, and somebody else. You have always been an unusually hard working man, and you have piled up work on yourself while laboring under a strain, and between the two you are going to go down, and make a nervous wreck of yourself. You have never been ill, and you don't know in the least how a strong man feels when he is helpless; I could predict what the end would be with you." The old Doctor was very earnest. "Be warned," he said. "I have seen too many of your type go under."

"What would you have me do?"

"Pull yourself together and drop it all, your work and this place; go as far away as you can and get other interests. I believe you can, for you are no weakling. You love money making, but drop it for a while."

Varek had risen in sudden irritation. "Money making!" he said bitterly; "I hate it!—I hate the office, I hate every day that passes, and all the chatter I have to listen to. I am tired to death of the kind of men it makes—God as just a word to swear by, and our great golden calf to kneel to!—I've kept at it, for I don't know what else to turn to; I daren't stop. What do you suppose I'd do with a whole day of idleness on my hands? Talk about nerve! I haven't enough to stock a baby with."

"You're worse off than I thought," said the Doctor gravely.

"Perhaps—but this much I know—I am better off working. I may break down as you say, but with nothing to do—Lord, I wouldn't be long settling the question then!"

"H'm," said the Doctor, nodding; then he sighed. "Well, if you persist, I shall probably have the opportunity of keeping my promise to Janet."

Varek, who was moving about restlessly, whirled round on him. "The promise she speaks of in her letter?—What was it?"

"To send for her if you were ill, and I shall do it. You are too much of a man to let that happen, or I've not had a correct understanding of you since I have known you."

Varek looked at the old man steadily for a time, and then he laughed. "Thank you, Doctor," he said. "I realize that that was your last argument, and you meant more than you said. . . . I am on a burning boat, the water under me and the sky above, and not much help from either. I must not break down and take leave of my wits—I should ruin her happiness effectually. I must not make an end of myself—I confess it has seemed a way out to me—for with her capacity for magnifying her own responsibility, I should be plunging her into trouble. It looks to me like 'I'll be damned if I do, I'll be damned if I don't, and I'll be damned if I do or I don't.'"

The old Doctor shook his head. "But I don't agree to that last clause," he said, and he smiled up through his gray brows at the tall man. "I have an immense faith in you."

He did not get any immediate answer, but the color had flushed darkly in Varek's face. He stood for a while and then moved for his hat. "You see," he said rather thickly, "I've always had something to fight for, some object in view that I thought worth while—but the bottom's dropped out of my view of life—and—well, I've just been drifting, thinking it didn't matter," and he held out his hand to the Doctor.

"Matter!" said the old man, grasping it. "*Gott in Himmel!* there never was a time when it mattered so much!—Why, man, what better can you find to fight for?"

VIII.

"HEAVY TOLL"

In the next two weeks Varek electrified his many acquaintances. He closed out his business and announced his intention of travelling. He dealt handsomely by Ehrenstein and Braun, but he had given Ehrenstein a terrible shock. "It's beyond me!" he said helplessly to every one he met. "Why he was making money hand over fist; it's just beyond me!"

Whatever reason Varek had had during the previous winter and spring for putting his house in order, the fact remained that he had done so, and his present step meant very little trouble. The first thing he took up after arranging his own affairs was the question of Bronson; Varek had his own reasons for watching over the old man, and he had done it for months. The day after the scene that Ehrenstein had witnessed, he had had Bronson taken to a place where he could be cared for until he was himself again, and in return Bronson had avoided him like the pestilence; even when intoxicated he seemed to be consumed with fear of the younger man. There appeared to be no way of approaching him. The old man had brooded over his fear until it was an obsession.

Varek had given the matter much thought, and

finally decided upon his course, should an opportunity offer. It came sooner than he expected. He had gone into the Commercial Club one evening on a business appointment, and by chance sat on the spot in the library where he had talked with Bronson almost two years before. Since the night of his decision, and throughout the last two busy weeks, he had felt a curious sense of detachment from everything that had formed a part of his previous existence. The dulled perception of things that had been so poignantly present heretofore was a relief; it was like the sudden cessation of a throbbing tooth. His no longer seemed an active part. As he sat now, that scene with Bronson recurred to him, but it lacked vitality.

He had looked up casually and caught sight of a shambling figure making its way through the hall, and, as he guessed, to the stairway and sleeping rooms above. He thought then, a moment, and decided; his appointment was of no particular importance and he got up quickly and followed after.

The floor above was occupied by the sleeping rooms of the club, and the man before him had stopped at one of these doors and unlocked it. He moved less uncertainly than usual, and Varek was glad of it; he had wanted just such an opportunity. The man had switched on the lights, and crossing the room was in the act of drawing down the shades when Varek

stepped in and closed the door behind him. The noise caught Bronson's ear, and he turned. He stood perfectly still and the change in him was instantaneous, and fearful; his slouching body lifted, his head seemed to sink and flatten, the hanging flesh of his cheeks shoved up by his collar—a cobra poised to strike. Varek looked into a blinding flash that drove him against the wall and the couch, the back of which he grasped for support; there was a hot needle prick in his side, and a sudden desire to sink down.

The smoke cleared gradually and their eyes sought each other, Bronson slowly crouching, the pistol still in his hand, and Varek hanging over the couch, limp, his hands only having strength to hold. A gray pallor crept from lip to brow, and his eyes looked wearily across into the bloodshot ones that never winked in their terrible stare. Then the words formed slowly and fell monotonously from Varek's blanching lips—"It's—a—pity—you—did—that. . . . I—I—only meant to—help you——" The eyes never moved from his, but there was no comprehension dawning in the mottled, bloated face, and Varek went on with an effort. "I've only wanted to do you a good turn all these months—I would give a lot if I hadn't mistreated you—back at that time—but I didn't know then. . . . Come nearer, and don't be afraid—just listen to me a little," he spoke gently, persuasively, but the man before him only glared, a

meaningless stare, and Varek sighed heavily. "It's no use," he muttered, "he couldn't grasp it——" He stopped suddenly, listening. "Do you hear any one?" he asked. A look of something like intelligence had crossed Bronson's face, and his glance had shifted to the closed door and then came back to Varek.

"It's a noisy corner and it's early," Varek said. "I'll tell you how to get away in a minute." His voice had grown stronger, and his quick mind was working. He could do nothing with his feet, they were quite numb, but he reached out and, turning the handle of the door, opened it a trifle and drew out the key. He closed it again and locked it on the inside. Bronson crept forward at this with a muttered protest, his eyes wild with an added terror, but Varek stopped him. "Keep quiet," he said in a low voice, "it's true what I said—I mean well by you. I intend to get you out of here and nobody know it."

Varek had spoken low but clearly, and the trembling wreck before him seemed to comprehend that he would be allowed to escape, but he showed no sign of having heard anything else Varek had said; his muddled brain held just a terrible fear that his last act had only increased. He stood bent over, the loose flesh of his face quivering and his shoulders jerking spasmodically. Varek looked at him in a pity that drove out contempt. "Brace up," he said. "I'm

not done for yet. Now listen! how did you come up here—by the elevator or the stairs?" The creature raised its marred face and Varek made out, "The stairs."

"I hoped so," he said. "Now bring that pistol here, and lay it down just below my hand on the couch." The old man moved guardedly in his direction, and keeping as far as possible away stretched his shaking arm and put the pistol just out of Varek's reach; his body seemed to shrink away from the injured man's neighborhood.

It roused a sudden impatience in Varek. There was so much to do and he might collapse any moment. "Move quickly, can't you?" he exclaimed. "Don't you see I am going to tell them it's an accident? Get your wits together—you'll need them. Now do what I tell you. Step out there into the hall and go to the back end—there's a door there into the back passage. Shut it behind you, and go down the two flights of stairs—only take care the servants are not about. It will bring you out on the second floor, and then just take the main stairs to the street. You'll probably not meet a soul."

Varek could not gather if the old man grasped his directions, but he had unlocked the door for him and the cringing figure shrank out, its fascinated gaze still on his own white face. Then the door closed softly and Varek was alone. . . . His body was

entirely without sensation, but his brain was racing along, the thoughts coming and going in flashes, things long forgotten, the life of years passed in a second's review, followed in turn by the urgency of the moment. The flash of the weapon that lay below his hand had shown him his way clear. It seemed to him a year of time before he could press the bell in the wall behind him, and then press it again, and again.

They had moved him to St. Luke's and the Doctor with two others had made their examination. Varek had lost consciousness only for a short time, and his explanation of the accident had been as brief as possible; a simple statement that he had been shot in a careless handling of his pistol. The public would seize with avidity on whatever details could be gathered elsewhere, but Varek cared little what they thought provided they did not discover the truth.

It was almost midnight when the Doctor and the nurse were left in charge of their patient, and Varek had been keenly alive to all that had passed. The Doctor understood the impatience with which Varek eyed the nurse, and he sent her from the room; it would be better for the injured man to say what he had on his mind; the Doctor knew that he would not take a sedative until he had spoken.

His first words were incisive. "How long will I live—how many days can I count on?"

The Doctor knew why he asked the question, and answered him in the fewest words possible. "Several days if inflammation sets in, a longer time if it does not. The bullet went in through the front, passing through you, and cutting the spinal cord. You can move nothing but your arms and head."

"I will live long enough for her to get here?"

"I think so—there is even a chance that you may live quite a long time."

Varek drew his brows together, the old steel-like glint in his eye. "I shall live long enough for her to reach me—that's all I want to know. I'll live after that only as long as I choose." The Doctor thought as he looked at him that that was quite likely, but he made no answer, and Varek went on more gently. "Will you please send for her, Doctor? I will dictate the telegram—I have left her everything I possess—I have always meant her to have the money, and I have worked for months to have everything in order for her. She can live anywhere in the world she chooses—it will not tie her to this place. I shall ask her to marry me, I have thought it all over and there is no possible harm it can do her—but she shall judge. I had thought I could go without seeing her—but I can't do it. Now write and let me sleep."

Leo Varek was passing fast. There was no need for him to guard against a weary time of lingering.

He had talked long and fully to the Doctor of his affairs, and had suffered little in those days, but he was steadily sinking. He knew the hour she would come, and lay with his eyes on the door—he might possibly have a day with her, but more probably a much shorter time.

His ears caught the sounds in the outer room before the Doctor's did. "She has come," he said. The Doctor went quickly out, and then there was a pause before it opened again.

The late afternoon sun fell in a broad band of light on the threshold, and she stood a moment in its radiance. It fell on the soft waves of her hair, and touched the curve of her slightly parted lips; the blue of her great eyes met his, wide and deep in their message of pity—and the next moment his outstretched arms had closed about her. "My little girl—my own little girl," he whispered—and again, and again, "I have been so hungry for you—so hungry and thirsty——" Her hand stole up and held his lips to hers in a long silence.

"You will marry me now, Peggy, and not leave me?—it will be only a short time," he said.

"Yes. I should have done it before if you had asked me."

"I know—but it is better this way. . . . And when I am—gone—you must listen to him, Peggy—that will be best too."

"Yes."

His eyes closed in the ebbing of the strength that had roused him. "Call them now, little one," he whispered. "I may not have long."

They had gone, and the two were alone. Varek had ordered them to raise him as high as possible on his couch, and she sat gathered in his arm, her head in the hollow of his shoulder; his eyes met the upward look of hers, and his big hand held her small one pressed against his breast. "Raise those shades," he had commanded them before they left, "it is growing dark here," and they sat now in the full glow of the evening sun. It would be hours before darkness came, but to Varek it was already twilight. He raised his eyes and caught through the wide opened window the fading glimpse of the city. He looked down again into the glory of her gaze, and his lip lifted and quivered; his world lay in the circle of his arm and he was leaving it; he had meant to go without explanation, but he could not, and he spoke distinctly.—"Peggy, you must know—I meant not to tell you—I—I have thought of it more than once, but I did not take my own life—he did it, Calvin Bronson. I was going away to fight things out by myself, it was the best way to help you—then I saw him and was going to tell him what I had known for a year—that he was my father. He was drunk, and mad with fright—

and he shot me. "She spoke a trembling word, and he drew her closer. "He has gone before me, Peggy, he died last night, here just below me, and the Doctor is the only one who knows some of the truth. He was such as he was born and made himself—I cannot judge him. He was my own father, and my name is not Varek—I don't know why my mother chose it even. He married her years ago and she left him very soon, and I doubt if he ever knew he had a son, but she was a good woman, Peggy. I had found it all out that day I begged you to marry me—and it gave me courage to stay away from you——" His voice had sunk to a whisper. "In all these weeks and months—I have been learning—myself. I was a proud man and I held my head high in my arrogance—I had owned to no power but my own will—my acts had looked to me as I chose to see them. I had loathed that old man—and his deeds—for years. It was a contempt that had entered my marrow—and here I was very flesh of his flesh, and my acts were no different from his—no whit better. No, they were worse, for I had the better brain and the stronger will. I carried this knowledge about with me, and my pride bit the dust. You had taught me to see differently—without our knowing it, you had taught me, but this last—it jerked the scales entirely from my eyes—and—I saw—myself —as I—was——" His chest rose and fell with his deep-drawn breaths. "It's been a—long—road—I've

travelled," he gasped—"long,—but I've paid toll —heavy toll——"

The girl raised herself, and her arms crept round his neck and drew his head to her breast, and her lips trembled over the words, "But—now—dear—it will all be—right——" He could not lift his head, but he barely breathed her name, and was still. . . . The sinking sun had dropped lower, and it touched his eyes and lips into a smile, and its radiance rested on her bent head.

THE END.

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